

**Coronavirus pandemic****London faces tighter Covid curbs from midnight on Friday**

Essex, York and Chesterfield also moved to tier 2, which prohibits mixing of households in any indoor setting



London mayor Sadiq Khan said the capital was at a 'critical moment' in its fight against coronavirus © Charlie Bibby/FT

**Jim Pickard, Robert Wright** and **Daniel Thomas** in London and **Andy Bounds** in Manchester 5 HOURS AGO

Londoners are to be banned from socialising with other households indoors from midnight on Friday evening in an attempt to contain the spread of coronavirus in the UK capital, health secretary Matt Hancock announced on Thursday.

Mr Hancock told the House of Commons that London would enter the government's tier 2 "high alert" of tighter restrictions. However, the government's strategy suffered a major blow after talks with political leaders in Greater Manchester failed to reach an agreement on the region moving into tier 3, the [highest alert level](#).

The health secretary said that infection rates were on a "steep upward path" in London and doubling every 10 days — with the number of cases now at 97 per 100,000 people.

The latest data indicate that 13 out of 32 London boroughs recorded more than 100 cases per 100,000 in the week ending October 8 — seen as a "trigger threshold" by ministers.

Sadiq Khan, the Labour mayor of London, told a session of the London Assembly earlier on Thursday that the capital was at a "critical moment" in its fight against coronavirus.

“Hospital admissions are up,” Mr Khan said. “More patients are going to intensive care and, sadly, the number of Londoners dying is increasing again.”

Other areas entering tier 2 on Friday night include Essex, Elmbridge, Barrow-in-Furness, Erewash, York, Chesterfield and North East Derbyshire, Mr Hancock announced. This will mean that from Saturday, out of England’s 54m population, about 1.6m people — in Liverpool — will be in tier 3 and almost 25m people in tier 2.

“I know that these restrictions are difficult for people, I hate the fact that we have to bring them in — but it is essential that we do bring them in both to keep people safe and to prevent greater economic damage in the future,” he said. “The threat remains grave and serious.”

Mayors and council leaders in Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Yorkshire and north-east England are calling for greater financial support before joining Liverpool city region in the “very high alert” level, which sees the closure of pubs, gyms and other leisure businesses.

On Thursday, Andy Burnham, the mayor of Greater Manchester, and nine of the 10 Greater Manchester council leaders — all Labour — refused to agree to their region entering tier 3 during a call with Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s chief of staff Eddie Lister on Thursday morning.

“Today we communicated our clear and unanimous view to the government: it is wrong to place some of the poorest parts of England in a punishing lockdown without proper support for the people and businesses affected,” the Manchester leaders said in a statement.

“To do so will result in certain hardship, job losses and business failure. It will cause harm in a different way — to people’s mental health — and is not certain to control the virus.”

The government wants their agreement but could act unilaterally.

Ministers have offered to pay 66 per cent of the wages of people whose workplaces are closed, but nothing for supply chain businesses, taxi drivers and others who could also suffer a drop in trade.

Mr Khan told assembly members he was pressing for greater financial support for London businesses to overcome the effect of the new restrictions. He said he was also asking for a short, [national “circuit breaker” lockdown](#) across England.

Living under tier 2 restrictions means people cannot meet anyone outside their household or support bubble in any indoor setting — whether private homes or pubs and restaurants. The “rule of six” applies outdoors.

Schools, gyms, places of worship, hotels and shops will remain open but people will have to obey the social contact rules of not mixing beyond their household. Residential care homes will be closed to external visitors “except in exceptional circumstances”, according to the government.

Residents are also to be encouraged to work from home, cut the number of journeys they make — particularly to tier 3 areas — and avoid public transport as much as possible.

People are still allowed to travel out of tier 2 areas, although the government is asking people in tier 2 “not to mix indoors with others, including in tier 1 areas”.

Hospitality bosses have called for greater financial support for London's pubs, restaurants and cafés, which will have customers limited to family bubbles.

Kate Nicholls, head of trade group UKHospitality, said the move into tier 2 was “a curse for businesses” and the “worst of all worlds”. “They will be trapped in a no man’s land of being open, but with severe restrictions that will significantly hit custom, all while unable to access the job support available in tier 3.”

The New West End Company, which represents more than 600 retail and leisure businesses in central London, on Thursday sought to reassure shoppers ahead of the crucial Christmas period with plans for 24-hour cleaning and social distancing ambassadors.

After an initial bounce, it found that footfall across the West End had stalled since the summer.

Catherine McGuinness, policy chair of the City of London Corporation, said the measures were difficult but necessary. However, the City is concerned about the rules on working from home and the impact that these will have on the economy.

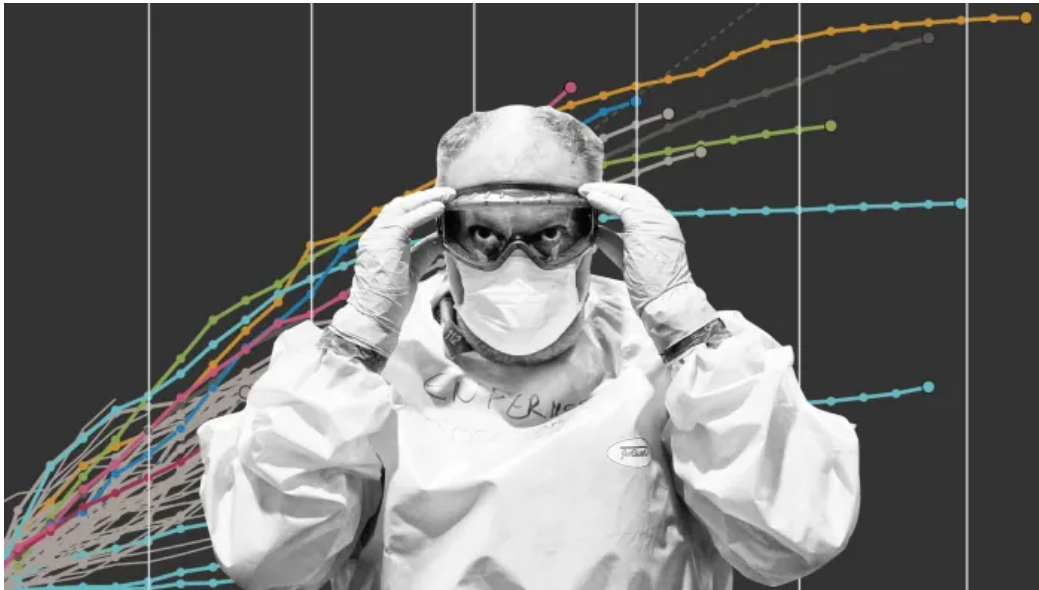
“These new restrictions should be regularly reviewed in light of the evidence,” she said. “Getting employees back to the workplace safely and quickly is vital to ensure our economy does not freeze over this winter.”

Jasmine Whitbread, chief executive of lobby group London First, gave the decision a cautious welcome. “If tough action now means we can save lives and avoid a more severe lockdown later, then businesses in the capital will hope that these short-term measures will prevent worse to come,” she said.

Ms Whitbread said the government must use the period of tighter restrictions “to fix the track-and-trace system and put in further support for those businesses unable to trade, including extending business rate and value added tax reliefs”.

## Latest coronavirus news

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