

Coronavirus Live Updates: Plans for Reopening Stir Frustration in U.K.

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The U.K. government's plan to ease the lockdown sowed confusion about what to do, and when.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson's long-awaited blueprint for reopening Britain's economy ran into a barrage of criticism on Monday that characterized the plan as vague, confusing or contradictory. A question-and-answer session with the prime minister did not make things much clearer.

Mr. Johnson said on Sunday and Monday that the government's coronavirus message was shifting from "stay home" to "stay alert," but many people wondered what the change meant.

Mr. Johnson, making his first statement to Parliament on the virus, rejected criticism on Monday that his proposals were too vague, saying he trusted the public to apply "good, solid British common sense."

Taking questions from reporters and members of the public, he said the shift was from a simple directive to a "more complicated" one, but then he added, "staying alert for the vast majority of people still means staying at home as much as possible." Most things, he said, are "pretty much as they have been."

The government's written plan, released on Monday, avoided giving much concrete guidance on how and when to reopen, and much of it was advisory, not mandatory. For example, it stated, some schools should reopen at some point next month, and school administrations should "urge more children who would benefit from attending in person to do so."

The plan advised people who cannot work from home to contact their employers about returning to work; the government said that had been the guidance all along. It said workplace safety guidelines would be coming.

The plan told people to avoid public transportation, which for millions of people rules out going to work. The government said people should wear masks in public, but did not require it.

In February and March, Mr. Johnson took a more laissez-faire approach to social distancing and testing than his European counterparts, which critics said contributed to Britain's worsening outbreak. Then he reversed himself and imposed a lockdown, though not as strict as those in France, Spain and Italy.

As a small number of new cases emerge in Wuhan, the city orders tests for all residents.

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The city of Wuhan, where the coronavirus emerged late last year, has ordered that all residents be tested in the next 10 days after six new cases were reported in one neighborhood.

Wuhan, with a population of 11 million, has already tested large numbers of residents. Many employers required that their workers be tested before returning to their jobs last month. The new round of testing reinforces fears that the outbreak can re-emerge from hidden cases.

An 89-year-old man was confirmed to be infected on Saturday, the first new confirmed case in the city since early April. He was tested last week after feeling unwell. Five other cases were announced on Monday, including the man's wife, 81, and four others who live in their neighborhood. The five are all asymptomatic.

Wuhan imposed a lockdown on Jan. 23 and only lifted it on April 8.

More than 3,800 people have died in the city, according to the official tally. China has faced questions about the accuracy of its coronavirus numbers and whether it has divulged the true extent of its outbreak.

The head of the street committee for the area with the new cluster was removed from office for poor management after the cases were reported, the state-run Xinhua news service reported.

China has begun to reopen after a widespread lockdown put in place to control the coronavirus. But flare-ups of new cases have persisted. Parts of northeast China increased controls last month after a spate of new cases that were traced to people returning from Russia.

And on Sunday, Shulan in Jilin Province declared that it was at "high risk" from the epidemic after a rash of at least 15 infections around the area that started with a woman who was reported to have no history of contact with known cases.

China marks the anniversary of a disaster with echoes in the present.

A disaster in China kills thousands of people, putting the Communist Party in a delicate spot. At first, the authorities cannot help but acknowledge the magnitude of the calamity, giving journalists wide berth to cover the crisis and allowing enraged antigovernment postings to remain online.

But soon enough, old instincts kick in. News outlets are muzzled. Grieving families are silenced. Efforts to hold officials accountable are suppressed.

The anniversary of the earthquake that struck Sichuan Province on May 12, 2008, carries special relevance this year, as China grapples with another devastating tragedy.

The central government appears to be keeping the coronavirus outbreak largely under control within China's borders. But it has deflected or downplayed questions about its initial response to the virus, in a pattern that seems much unchanged since the 2008 quake, China's deadliest in decades.

Twelve years ago, nearly 70,000 people died after the earthquake wrecked buildings and roads in Sichuan and sent boulders careening down mountains and hillsides. A large number of the victims were schoolchildren, raising questions about building standards and corruption in the area.

The government eventually acknowledged that a rush to build schools probably led to shoddy construction. Still, officials tried to stifle unapproved commemorations that could have rekindled uncomfortable questions about why so many people died. Official memorial ceremonies, by contrast, focused on the heroism of the rescue effort and the speed of the reconstruction.

Latest in science: A second wave of the virus in the United States may come sooner than expected.

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As businesses open and restrictions ease in parts of the United States, scientists say a much-feared "second wave" of infection may not wait until fall and instead may become a series of wavelets breaking unpredictably across the country.

Most states that are reopening have not met even minimal criteria set by public health experts for doing so safely, and in some, coronavirus cases are rising. A resurgence in infections may not become apparent for two or three weeks, when some people would need hospitalization.

The question now, scientists say, is whether the nation can minimize the damage.

Evidence is mounting that masks -- if worn in public places, by everyone -- are far more effective at stopping transmission than was previously realized. While testing remains inadequate, home-use nasal swabs and saliva tests are on the way and may provide a clearer picture of where the virus is.

Employers are moving to design safer workplaces. A modestly effective antiviral treatment has been found. Laboratories around the world are racing toward the grail -- a vaccine -- at an unprecedented pace.

And scientists are also learning more about the virus.

A new study published Monday in the journal JAMA Pediatrics paints the most detailed picture yet of American children who were treated in intensive care units as the pandemic was taking hold.

The study looked at 48 cases from 14 hospitals in patients under 21, in late March and early April. Two patients died. Eighteen were placed on ventilators and two remain on the breathing machines more than a month later, said Dr. Lara S. Shekerdemian, chief of critical care at Texas Children's Hospital, and an author of the study.

The study both reinforces the evidence that only a small percentage of children will be severely affected by the virus, but they can become devastatingly ill.

None of the study's subjects were stricken by the new mysterious inflammatory syndrome linked to the coronavirus that can cause life-threatening cardiac issues in children.

U.S. news: Trump abruptly ends his news conference after being pressed by a pair of female reporters.

President Trump abruptly ended his Rose Garden news conference on Monday shortly after a Chinese-American reporter pressed him on why he suggested she "go ask China" in response to her question on virus death rates.

Weijia Jiang, a White House correspondent for CBS News, asked Mr. Trump why he had created a "global competition" by claiming that the United States had done far better than any other country on testing its citizens for the virus.

"Well," Mr. Trump responded, "they're losing their lives everywhere in the world, and maybe that's a question you should ask China."

Ms. Jiang, who had been leaning into a contact-free microphone to ask her question, lowered her face mask and paused for a couple seconds before asking, "Sir, why are you saying that to me, specifically?"

In a recent interview, Mr. Trump complained that Ms. Jiang and another reporter were not behaving like Donna Reed, an actress famous for her portrayals as a consummate housewife. Mr. Trump has targeted Ms. Jiang in recent days for her tough line of questioning in news briefings, including gruffly telling her to "keep your voice down" in past exchanges.

The next reporter he called on, Kaitlan Collins of CNN, has engaged in similar back-and-forth exchanges with Mr. Trump. Ms. Collins tried to ask Mr. Trump a question after briefly ceding her turn at the microphone to let Ms. Jiang follow up, but Mr. Trump tried to move on to another reporter. After Ms. Collins remained at the microphone and twice tried to ask her question, Mr. Trump abruptly ended his news conference and left the Rose Garden.

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Also on Monday in the U.S.:

New guidance from the White House will require Trump administration employees to wear masks when inside the West Wing, according to an internal memo. It was an abrupt establishment of a policy that came as a number of White House staff tested positive for the virus in recent days. The new rules are not expected to apply to Mr. Trump or Vice President Mike Pence.

President Trump declared at a news conference that "we have met the moment, and we have prevailed," making a series of misleading statements as he claimed that the United States had far exceeded other nations in testing and that the number of cases was rapidly declining.

Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo of New York, the state hit hardest by the virus, announced on Monday that three upstate regions might partially reopen this weekend, with limited construction, manufacturing and curbside retail allowed.

A federal watchdog is investigating whether a top Interior Department official violated ethics rules when she helped decide how a critical tranche of funds for Native American tribes in the \$2.2 trillion coronavirus stimulus law should be distributed.

Germany is keeping a wary eye on the rate of virus spread as it moves to reopen.

The rate of coronavirus spread in Germany remained slightly and stubbornly above a crucial threshold for eventually taming the epidemic, officials said on Monday, even as many schools and stores across the country were allowed to reopen.

Epidemiologists carefully watch how many people, on average, an infected person spreads the virus to -- a number known as the reproduction or R factor. If the figure is below 1.0, it suggests the number of active cases is declining; a number above 1.0 indicates cases are increasing.

The latest R factor was estimated at 1.07, the Robert Koch Institute, Germany's primary disease control agency, said on Monday -- the third day in a row the figure was above the threshold of 1.0, although it was down slightly from 1.1 on Saturday and 1.13 on Sunday.

But calculations by different experts can vary based on how they account for unknown factors, and any one estimate has a high degree of uncertainty. The Koch Institute said there was a 95 percent likelihood that Monday's true figure was somewhere from 0.88 to 1.29.

In April, after reporting that it had pushed the R factor well below 1.0, Germany began easing restrictions on public life, which officials warned would cause infections to rise, as they have.

"The increase in the estimated R-value makes it necessary to monitor developments very closely in the coming days," the Koch Institute said on Monday.

Chancellor Angela Merkel has explained that the goal is to remain under 1.0, because even a rate as low as 1.1, if unchecked, would overwhelm the health care system by October. Ms. Merkel has said restrictions can be reimposed if the numbers worsen.

Germany went ahead with its second phase of loosening restrictions on Monday in all but three regions where the number of new infections was deemed too high.

The chancellor and governors of the country's 16 states agreed last week on a plan that would allow regions with low numbers to restart their economies and allow groups of people from two separate households to meet in public, while observing social distancing rules.

Reporting and research was contributed by Raymond Zhong, Wang Yiwei, Melissa Eddy, Dan Bilefsky, Donald G. McNeil Jr., Neil Vigdor, Maggie Haberman, Michael D. Shear, Austin Ramzy and Stephen Castle

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/12/world/coronavirus-news.html>

Graphic

PHOTO: Social distancing at a park in North London last week. (PHOTOGRAPH BY Andrew Testa for The New York Times FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES)

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