

COVID-19: Some restrictions should last until all adults have been vaccinated, senior health official says

The PHE official admits it's "difficult to say" if restrictions this summer will be tougher than they were last year.



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COVID-19

CORONAVIRUS



Restrictions possible until 'everyone is vaccinated'



Why you can trust Sky News

Coronavirus restrictions should last until at least all adults have been vaccinated, a senior Public Health England official has warned.

"we can release everything and get back to life as it was".

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The government aims for everyone in vaccine priority groups one to nine to get a jab by May

Speaking on a special programme, COVID Crisis: Learning The Lessons, she admitted it was "difficult to say" if rules this summer could be tighter than they were during the same period last year.

"One of the things we've learned is that when people go on holiday, perhaps they drop their guard a bit, perhaps they mingle a bit closer and

they mingle in groups," Dr Hopkins said.

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"That may be one of the areas in which spread of infection can occur.

"So I think we are going to have to have some measures in place until the whole population is vaccinated, at least all of the adult population.

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"And even then I think we'll need to know more about transmission before we can release everything and get back to life as it was."

About 15 million people in the top four priority groups for vaccination should be offered a jab by mid-February, with the next five groups reached by the end of April.

Dr Hopkins said it was 'difficult' to judge if measures this summer will be stricter than last

No date has yet been set for when all adults should be vaccinated by, or which groups will be included in the second priority list - though there have been calls for emergency service staff, teachers and shop workers to be prioritised.

Dr Hopkins' comments on continued restrictions are likely to inflame the concerns of some backbench Conservatives, who are itching for Prime Minister Boris Johnson to lift measures as soon as possible.

Steve Baker, a Tory MP and deputy chair of the COVID Recovery Group, said earlier he feared "senior scientists are failing to recognise their power to spread despair and despondency".

He continued: "Some seem to be floating untested hypotheses in the media. Doing so is not science. It is the death of science. Perhaps worse, it brings scientists squarely into the political domain, something we would I am sure all like to avoid."

14,012,219
People vaccinated in UK >

Home Office minister Victoria Atkins told Sky News on Friday that next week would be a "critical week" before the prime minister unveils his roadmap for easing lockdown restrictions on 22 February.

"Next week is a critical week, we are going to gather all of the data - both internationally and our own data," she said.

Ms Atkins added: "Whilst the scientists, the medics are, completely understandably, concentrating on the clinical and medical repercussions of this pandemic, the prime minister has this very difficult balancing act of keeping the public with us - keeping us all united in wanting to stick to the rules.

"Hands, face, space and so on and the lockdown. But he also has to keep an eye on the economy."

Dr Hopkins was also asked by Sky News on Thursday if more lives could have been saved in the second wave had lockdown been imposed quicker.

She replied: "The fullness of time will tell us how many lives could have been saved."

She also did not appear to rule out Chancellor Rishi Sunak's Eat Out To Help Out scheme having contributed to a growth in infections over the

summer, saying: "Every social interaction leads to a rise in infections, if infections are rising in the community."

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Meanwhile, vaccines minister Nadhim Zahawi pressed for everyone offered a **coronavirus** jab to get one, telling Sky News: "This is a race against death."

He defended the government's handling of the pandemic, after being accused by a member of the public on the programme of not following scientific advisers' recommendations closely enough.

"Sometimes of course, when you look back you think 'well if I'd known that then I may have done things slightly differently'," Mr Zahawi said.

"But we were learning, as we were having to also make these really tough decisions on a daily basis - as were the scientists."

Boris Johnson will announce his roadmap out of lockdown in less than two weeks

Mr Zahawi also denied ministers are planning to create vaccine passports, after Sky News revealed ministers will consider a proposal by the Cabinet Office to [get working on vaccination and testing certificates](#).

But he added: "If people need to be able to demonstrate they've had a vaccine, their data is held by the national vaccine and immunisation system, and you have to be able to make that data available to people if they require it."

And Mr Zahawi said ministers were trying particularly hard to persuade people from ethnic minorities to get vaccinated, given the roughly 15% of people in the UK who were hesitant about getting a jab "skew heavily towards BAME [black and minority ethnic] communities".

The prime minister is expected to publish his "roadmap" out of lockdown in the week beginning 22 February, and potentially announce schools in England will start to reopen fully again on 8 March.

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