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Research Briefing

## Coronavirus: A history of English lockdown laws

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This Library briefing paper provides a history of England's coronavirus "lockdown laws"

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Hundreds of laws have been made in the UK in response to the coronavirus pandemic. [1] Many of these could be described as "lockdown laws" because they placed restrictions on people to slow the spread of the coronavirus. This briefing uses the term "lockdown laws" to describe national and local coronavirus restrictions regulations and directions which placed restrictions on movement, gatherings and high-street businesses.

The Library's paper [Coronavirus: the lockdown laws](#) provides a detailed discussion of these laws. A [collection of briefings on coronavirus restrictions](#) is available on the Library's website.

#### Coronavirus guidance and the lockdown laws

The Government has published a huge range of guidance relating to coronavirus. Most coronavirus guidance has been a mixture of information on the law and public health advice. The UK Government amended and adapted its coronavirus guidance as its response to coronavirus progressed. Some of these changes did not require changes to the law but did have a significant impact on how people experienced the lockdown. Coronavirus guidance is not discussed in detail in this briefing.

### First national lockdown (March to June 2020)

England was in national lockdown between late March and June 2020. Initially, all "non-essential" high street businesses were closed and people were ordered to stay at home, permitted to leave for essential purposes only, such as buying food or for medical reasons. Starting in May 2020, the laws were slowly relaxed. People were permitted to leave home for outdoor recreation (beyond exercise) from 13 May. On 1 June, the restriction on leaving home was replaced with a requirement to be home overnight, and people were permitted to meet outside in groups of up to six people.

### Minimal lockdown restrictions (July to September 2020)

Most lockdown restrictions were lifted on 4 July 2020. Most hospitality businesses were permitted to reopen. New health and safety guidance on operating businesses "Covid securely" was published. Gatherings up to thirty people were legally permitted, although the Government was still recommending people avoid gatherings larger than six.

### Reimposing restrictions (September to October 2020)

On 14 September, restrictions for gathering in England were tightened and people were once again legally prohibited from meeting more than six people socially. The new "rule of six" applied both indoors and outdoors. Eleven days later, pubs, bars and restaurants were told they had to shut between 10pm and 6am.

During this period, a range of local restrictions were imposed across England. On the 14 October, the Government rationalised local restrictions by introducing a "three tier system". At first, most of the country was placed in the least restrictive tier one, which had similar restrictions to the previous national rules. As time went on, more of the country was placed in the higher two tiers.

### Second national lockdown (November 2020)

On 5 November, national restrictions were reintroduced in England. During the second national lockdown, non-essential high street businesses were closed, and people were prohibited from meeting those not in their "support bubble" inside. People could leave home to meet one person from outside their support bubble outdoors.

### Reintroducing a tiered system (December 2020)

On 2 December, the tiered system was reintroduced with modifications.

Restrictions on hospitality businesses were stricter and most locations were initially placed in tiers two and three. On 19 December, the Prime Minister announced that a fourth tier would be introduced, following concerns about a rising number of coronavirus cases due to a new variant (what was to become known as the Alpha variant, first identified in Kent).

The tier four rules were like those imposed during the second national lockdown. On 30 December, after the first review of tiers under the new system, around 75% of the country was placed under tier four restrictions.

## Third national lockdown (January to March 2021)

Following concerns that the four-tier system was not containing the spread of the Alpha variant, national restrictions were reintroduced for a third time on 6 January.

The rules during the third lockdown were more like those in the first lockdown. People were once again told to stay at home. However, people could still form support bubbles (if eligible) and some gatherings were exempted from the gatherings ban (for example, religious services and some small weddings were permitted).

## Leaving lockdown (March to July 2021)

On 8 March 2021, England began a phased exit from lockdown. A four-step plan, known as the [roadmap out of lockdown](#), intended to "cautiously but irreversibly" ease lockdown restrictions. Instead of a return to the tiered system, the Government said it planned to lift restrictions in all areas at the same time, as the level of infection was broadly similar across England.

England moved through the roadmap as planned but step four was delayed by four weeks to allow more people to receive their first dose of a coronavirus vaccine.

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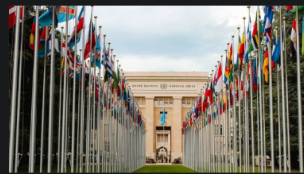
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