

COVID-19 Update: Re-Opening Roadmap Announcement

22 February 2021

Summary

Boris Johnson today appeared before the House of Commons to unveil the Government's "cautious" four-step plan to lift the Coronavirus lockdown. The Prime Minister stressed that timelines associated with each step are still indicative, and the nation's ability to move on to any future stage in the exit plan will therefore be contingent on meeting the following criteria:

1. The Coronavirus vaccine programme continues to go to plan;
2. Evidence shows vaccines are sufficiently reducing the number of people dying with the virus or needing hospital treatment;
3. Infection rates do not risk a surge in hospital admissions;
4. New variants of the virus do not fundamentally change the risk of lifting restrictions.

The Prime Minister also confirmed that the first stage of easing restrictions will take place across the whole of England, due to the current uniform spread of the virus.

Below is a summary of the Prime Minister's address, as well as an outline of the key messages ukactive has been relaying to government officials, civil servants, MPs, and journalists to highlight the safety and essential nature of the physical activity sector.

Coronavirus Exit Plan Announcement

The Prime Minister has today announced the [roadmap](#) for reopening society. Speaking in the House of Commons this afternoon, the Prime Minister confirmed a phased approach to reopening, with gyms and leisure centres able to reopen from 12th April at the earliest.

Each of these steps will be separated by five weeks from the previous stage and are subject to review.

The full timeline is below (dates given earliest possible):

Step 1

8th March: Schools to reopen across England. Breakfast and after school clubs to resume, and after school sports to resume where necessary to support parents. Under-18 sport can take place at school as part of educational provision, or as part of wraparound care, but should not otherwise take place at this time

29th March: Outdoor sports facilities to reopen – these facilities such as tennis and basketball courts, and swimming pools, can be used by people in line with the wider social contact limits. Formally organised outdoor sports – for adults and under 18s - can also restart and will not be subject to the gathering limits, but should be compliant with guidance issued by national governing bodies

All children will be able to access any outdoor childcare and supervised activities. Parent and child groups can also take place outdoors with a limit of 15 attendees (children under five years of age do not count towards the attendee limit.)

Children will still only be able to attend indoor childcare or supervised activities where doing so will allow parents or carers to work, seek work, attend education, seek medical attention or attend a support group.

Step 2

12th April: Indoor gyms and leisure centres and spas to reopen (but not including saunas and steam rooms, which are due to open at Step 3) for individual use or within household groups – no indoor sport or group exercise classes allowed.

All children will be able to attend any indoor children's activity, including sport, regardless of circumstance. Parent and child groups of up to 15 people (not counting children aged under five years old) can restart indoors

Step 3

17th May: Adult Indoor group sports and exercise classes, will be allowed to resume. Saunas and steam rooms within spas and indoor leisure facilities will also be able to reopen. Restrictions on meetings outdoors will be lifted, indoor pubs and restaurants will be able to reopen, as will children's play areas.

Step 4

21st June: No legal limit on social contact. Venues such as nightclubs and theatres will be able to reopen.

The above timeline is subject to the four tests outlined above. The Prime Minister highlighted that the Government will also be continuously reviewing measures pertaining to social distancing and mandatory face masks throughout the year.

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More people
More active
More often

We are **ukactive** 

ukactive Statement

“Today’s roadmap announcement from the Prime Minister brings important clarity to the easing of restrictions in England and, while highlighting the disruption caused by the third lockdown, we also understand the necessary caution shown around infection rates.

“With positive news provided by the rollout of the vaccine, we hope the four-part plan for reopening society heralds the end of lockdowns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We are encouraged to see plans in stage one for the reopening of schools and school sport, which are vital for our children’s activity levels and overall wellbeing. We will support our members so they fully understand the detail behind this initial stage in the roadmap. It is also positive to see the easing of restrictions for outdoor activity overall.

“Crucially, we welcome the news that gyms, pools and leisure centres feature in the earliest stage possible for reopening indoor venues, providing vital clarity for thousands of our members and a long-awaited boost for millions of their customers.

“The decision to reopen fitness and leisure facilities in stage two underlines the role they play in our nation’s social fabric and in supporting the NHS, providing an essential service for the mental and physical health of millions.

“The Government also clearly recognises the sector’s excellent safety record, demonstrated by our regular COVID-19 data reporting, and we will continue to provide these updates throughout the next chapter in the management of the pandemic.

“Furthermore, we will continue to work with the Government and its health agencies to address any outstanding questions they have regarding indoor classes, which are due to reopen in stage three.

“These reopening plans need to go hand-in-hand with bespoke measures for the survival and recovery of thousands of gyms, pools and leisure facilities, which require urgent financial and regulatory support from the Government in its upcoming Budget (3 March).

“Once this has been achieved, we will work with the Government to map out the essential role our sector can play in improving the physical, mental and social health of our nation, which has been significantly impacted by this crisis.”

Key Messages

No 1: We are essential

- Regular exercise shown to improve a person's ability to regulate the immune system – essential for avoiding the severe symptoms of COVID-19 – and proven to boost vaccine efficacy¹
- Physical activity also supports the prevention of 20 chronic health conditions such as type-II diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer and depression²
- Physical inactivity is the fourth largest cause of death and disability in the UK³
- 66 per cent of cancer prehab and rehab services are provided in leisure centres
- Sport England Active Lives Survey 2019-20 showed gyms and leisure facilities account for 17.1 million adults achieving recommended activity levels of 150 mins or more per week through fitness activities and swimming – second only to walking⁴
- 3 million fewer adults in England were classed as active between mid-March and mid-May 2020 than in the same period in 2019⁵
- 44 per cent children did less than 30 mins physical activity per day at the end of lockdown in May, up 10 per cent from pre-COVID levels⁶
- Analysis by the Government's scientific advisory group, SAGE, warned that the loss in access to facilities will have a detrimental impact on mental wellbeing and potentially increase health inequalities among BAME and vulnerable groups
- Community sport and physical activity generates over £72 billion in social value every year⁷

No 2: We are safe and should be prioritised to reopen when restrictions ease

- Since re-opening in England on 25 July 2020, gyms and leisure facilities have continued to follow strict government guidance, ensuring social distancing among staff and customers, proper ventilation throughout, and comprehensive cleaning protocols
- ukactive data from 2,000 operators shows prevalence of the virus among visitors who have used facilities remains extremely low – an overall rate of just 1.7 cases per 100,000 visits, measured from 75 million visits across the UK (25 July to 27 December)

¹ Professor Greg Whyte. *Exercise and the vaccine*. December 2020.

² Booth, Frank W et al. "Lack of exercise is a major cause of chronic diseases." *Comprehensive Physiology* vol. 2,2 (2012): 1143-211. doi:10.1002/cphy.c110025

³ World Health Organisation. *New physical activity recommendations for reducing disease and prevent deaths*. 2011.

⁴ Sport England. *Active Lives Survey 2019-20*.

⁵ Sport England. *Active Lives Adult Survey – Mid-March to Mid-May 2020, Coronavirus Report*.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Sport England. *Social and economic value of community sport and physical activity*. 2020.

- Reported cases represent incidents where the authorities have informed facilities that a user, who has had a positive result since, attended a facility within a certain time period – rather than indicating transmission in the gym environment specifically
- Gym and leisure center Operators well-positioned to capture real-time data effectively based on membership details held within their databases
- Demonstrates the success of “COVID-secure” protocols in gyms and leisure facilities that were approved by the Government and SAGE – designed to ensure control in facilities and minimise the risk of transmission of the virus
- Clear evidence gyms and fitness operators are going to great lengths to ensure they are monitoring and controlling effectively – leading sector for tracking and tracing

Sector Safety: Response to statement from First Minister about reopening gyms in Wales

- Up to 20 December, among facilities sharing data, there had been over 1.8 million visits since reopening in Wales, with a case rate of just 2.06 cases per 100,000 visits
- ukactive has received no new scientific evidence or rationale behind the statements made by the First Minister on Friday 19 February 2021
- The First Minister has referred to concerns over the ‘Kent’ variant linked to gyms, yet there are no proposed changes to social distancing or wider restrictions to the population as a whole
- There has been no published evidence that the new variant, while more transmissible, travels further, remains suspended longer, or is present in greater quantities in expired air compared with the original COVID-19 variant
- ukactive will work with the Welsh Government to address these inconsistencies and have offered the sector’s full scientific and technical expertise to avoid these unnecessary misrepresentations of a sector that is essential for the physical, mental and social wellbeing of the people of Wales

No 3: We need support to ensure our survival and recovery

- 2,800 facilities at risk of permanent closure, along with 100,000 jobs in fitness and leisure
- Physical activity sector has received limited tailored support, despite being forced to close for a prolonged period during the first lockdown, again in November and now since January
- There is no trade-off between health and the economy when investing in the sector

- Projections show the latest lockdown and closure of gyms and leisure centres affects more than 7,000 facilities across the UK, serving more than 17 million people, including more than 10 million members
- The economic cost of lockdown for the sector is £90 million in lost revenue every week, based on lost membership fees – despite the Government’s furlough and business rate support, and top-grants⁸
- The sector requires a complete support package that not only includes funding, but investment and stimulus also

Key policy asks for Budget

Three-phased approach to supporting the physical activity sector going forward.

1. Survival: Measures that will prevent mass-scale insolvency across the sector.
2. Recovery: Measures designed to ensure continued cashflow for businesses in the face of substantial accrued debt.
3. Growth: Measures to accelerate revenues through the Exchequer to ensure the long-term prosperity of the sector over the next 18 months.

Survival:

- Extend the business rate holiday for physical activity and leisure providers until March 2022
- Provide financial support for operators for back-dated rent which will be due once the moratorium ends, in addition to extending the moratorium on commercial evictions to October 2021

Recovery:

- Offer a VAT Tax Reduction, in line with the current and any proposed future concessions for hospitality, for the fitness and leisure sector, resulting in an effective output tax reduction to 5% to support the sector’s recovery
- Confirm the monies pledged as part of the Coronavirus Job Retention Bonus. Solidifying the date on which this will be paid will release £126 million into the sector, supporting the cash position of

⁸ ukactive. Continued lockdown of fitness and leisure sector will cost £7.25m in missed health savings and £90 revenue every week. January 2021.

multiple businesses and supporting businesses to keep people safe from further redundancies and provide additional working capital to ensure survival

Growth

- Ensuring the debt from the CBILS be made independent of existing debt, rather than the current *para passu* categorisation
- Deferral of Corporation Tax payments for the physical activity sector for one year (until March 2022).
- Extend the Cycle to Work Scheme to include a wider array of physical activity opportunities and accessories including fitness trackers and gym memberships in order to support the health and well-being of the working population.

Long-term

- Extension of the National Leisure Recovery Fund to cover additional periods of closure.
- Allocate part of the £1 billion childcare funding budget to opening school sports facilities for children and young people over the summer holidays in disadvantaged communities, supporting them to access local, affordable and healthy activities.

Further information

For further information, please contact the ukactive Client Services team at info@ukactive.org.uk. ukactive will be collating FAQs for dissemination to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in order to obtain answers to any outstanding questions over the coming weeks.