

## COVID-19 – Weekly Round-up

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### Friday 19 October 2020

Heart of London Business Alliance is committed to ensuring our members receive the support they need while the situation in relation to COVID-19 is fast-changing. Our Daily Bulletin provides you with an update on the important announcements and guidance from the Government. In addition, it is recommended that our members monitor the [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) website for guidance regarding COVID-19.

Together with our local Member of Parliament, Nickie Aiken, Heart of London will continue to lobby Government for support for our members and your employees during this difficult time.

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### Headlines

- Prime Minister announces new tiered lockdown system
- Labour differs on COVID-19 approach
- Devolved nations pursue alternative lockdown measures
- Italy removed from travel corridor list
- £257 million funding for arts and cultural organisations

### Prime Minister announces new tiered lockdown system

**12<sup>th</sup> October:** On Monday, the Prime Minister [laid out](#) a new three-tiered lockdown system for England in response to accelerating COVID-19 transmission rates across the country, known as 'local Covid alert levels'. This followed reports indicating that more people were in hospital with COVID-19 at the time of the.

announcement than on the day that nationwide lockdown restrictions were first announced in March.

English regions will now be categorised into the following following alert levels:

- **Medium:** Covering most of the country, this corresponds to existing national measures, including the 'rule of six' and a 10pm curfew for pubs and restaurants.
- **High:** Prohibits household mixing indoors, in addition to measures included in the medium alert level.
- **Very High:** Prohibits social mixing indoors and outdoors, alongside the closing of pubs and bars. While retail, schools and universities can remain open, tighter restrictions on the hospitality, leisure, entertainment and personal care sectors could follow.

The announcement followed a [warning](#) from Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Jonathan Van-Tam that without action, the North West could see more patients in intensive care in four weeks' time than at the peak of the first wave.

### Changes in regional lockdowns

Reporting the highest transmission rates in England, the Liverpool City Region was the first area to be [moved](#) into the 'very high' alert tier on Monday, following Government discussions with Liverpool's Mayor [see below]. The Government is also currently in negotiations with other areas in the North, including Manchester, to impose Tier 3 status, while Lancashire agreed to enter Tier 3 this morning.

Furthermore, on Thursday, the Health Secretary, Matt Hancock [announced](#) that London would be among those areas moving into the 'high' Covid alert level from Friday night. Under these restrictions, people must not meet with anybody outside their household or support bubble in any indoor setting, whether at home or in a public place. While the London Mayor, Sadiq Khan, called for tighter restrictions, he has pressed the Government to deliver stronger financial support for businesses. Essex, York, and parts of Derbyshire and Surrey, will also be categorised as Tier 2 from Friday.

### **Further support for regions under lockdown**

Recognising that the Government's tiered alert system will bring region-specific economic challenges, Chancellor Rishi Sunak announced further economic support for areas facing heightened lockdown restrictions. During a press conference on Monday evening, the Chancellor [outlined](#) £1 billion of funding for local authorities facing tightening lockdown measures and the [expansion](#) of the Job Support Scheme for UK businesses forced to close due as a result of the new measures being applied in their localities. This includes payments to cover two-thirds of furloughed employees' salaries, and cash grants for businesses.

### **Labour differs on COVID-19 approach**

On Tuesday the Leader of the Opposition Keir Starmer [proposed](#) a 'circuit breaker' lockdown as an alternative to the Government's tiered system. Under Starmer's proposals, the whole of England would enter a lockdown of similar strength to that imposed in April for two weeks, in an attempt to bring the virus transmission rate back under control. Up to now, Labour has largely backed the Government's approach to the crisis while criticising its delivery. This is the first time that the opposition has set out an alternative plan to mitigate the spread of the virus, and represents a new level of politicisation in response to the ongoing pandemic response.

Furthermore, the introduction of the Government's a regional system and the decision-making process for how it is applied, has created a new dynamic between central government and local authorities in terms of the extent of their respective powers. This was particularly evident this week as the Labour metro mayors in Liverpool and Manchester responded to the decision to implement higher tier restrictions in their cities. Anticipating the Government's intention to include Manchester to Tier 3 lockdown measures, the Mayor of Manchester Andy Burnham [demanded](#) that the Government provide stronger financial support for local businesses and accused them of using the North as a test for an "experimental lockdown strategy". He has been [joined](#) in his calls by North of Tyne Labour Mayor Jamie Driscoll and leaders of seven regional councils. Government negotiations to maintain regional lockdowns are ongoing.

### **Devolved nations pursue alternative lockdown measures**

**14<sup>th</sup> October:** In contrast to England's tiered approach to lockdown measures, the devolved nations have pursued an alternative course to stem the virus this week.

#### **Northern Ireland**

Northern Ireland [implemented](#) a 'circuit breaker' lockdown under which, from Friday, bubble groups are restricted, overnight stays in private homes are prohibited and the majority of the hospitality sector will be closed for four weeks.

#### **Wales**

In Wales, the Senedd has continued to implement localised lockdown [measures](#), the Welsh First Minister [announced](#) new travel restrictions halting the movement of people living in areas with a high-prevalence of COVID-19 in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland from entering Wales.

#### **Scotland**

Meanwhile, following speculation of harsher lockdown measures, the Scottish First Minister affirmed on Thursday that current Scottish lockdown measures would remain, alongside an additional [announcement](#) making the wearing of face coverings mandatory in communal workplace spaces.

### Italy removed from travel corridor list

**15<sup>th</sup> October:** On Thursday, the Government [announced](#) that people entering England from Italy will need to self-isolate for two weeks from 18 October. The move, which follows consistent increases in newly reported virus cases, has been [replicated](#) by the Scottish Government. The news is likely to have a significant impact on half-term travel given that Italy had been one of the few major European holiday destinations where a travel corridor was in place. In contrast, the Greek island of Crete has been added to the Government's travel corridor list.

This follows the [creation](#) of the Government's Global Travel Taskforce last week, which hopes to ensure the recovery of the international travel sector through combining current self-isolation precautions with a new private testing regime for when people return from international travel. The Taskforce will work with industry and plans to report recommendations by early November.

### £257 million funding for arts and cultural organisations

**12<sup>th</sup> October:** The Culture Secretary, Oliver Dowden [announced](#) £257 million of funding for more than 1,300 arts and cultural organisations in England through the Government's Culture Recovery Fund. The funding aims to allow venues to plan for reopening and allow performances to restart, in light of the significant difficulty faced by the sector during lockdowns and social distancing measures. Further funding for such organisations is expected to be announced in the coming weeks.

### Devolved Nations

- **15<sup>th</sup> October:** The Northern Irish Finance Minister [announced](#) the expansion of financial support for businesses subject to lockdown restrictions across all 11 council areas.
- **12<sup>th</sup> October:** The Scottish Health Secretary [announced](#) an easing of restrictions on care home visits, with indoor visits extended to a maximum of four hours.
- **9<sup>th</sup> October:** The Welsh Government [announced](#) new restrictions on the region of Bangor, prohibiting entry or exit from the area without a reasonable excuse.

### Other News

- **13<sup>th</sup> October:** The Government has [announced](#) £10 million of funding for a Cold Weather Payment to support councils to protect rough sleepers during the winter months as they face risks of exposure to COVID-19.
- **12<sup>th</sup> October:** The Education Secretary [announced](#) that students will have more time to prepare for 2021 exams, given that most AS, A levels and GCSE exams will be held three weeks later than originally scheduled.
- **10<sup>th</sup> October:** The Government have [donated](#) £1 million to mental health charities through the Coronavirus Mental Health Response Fund, following the Help our Helplines campaign by ITV.

Cases have also continued to rise across England, with the transmission rates in the North causing particular concern. In Liverpool, Knowsley, and Manchester (the three worst affected places in England) infection rates now stands at over 500 cases per 100,000 people. Varying degrees of local lockdown restrictions are already in force across much of the North West, North-East and Yorkshire and further restrictions are [expected](#) to come into force on Monday.

Faced with this [rise](#) in cases and worrying reports predicting a shortage of hospital beds in the North of England, next week the Prime Minister is expected to reveal another COVID-19 plan. There is [speculation](#) that this could include a simplified three tier “traffic light system” for local lockdowns. Chancellor Rishi Sunak is also expected to make a statement later today on further job support, particularly for regions under lockdown.

### Thousands of tests not counted due to technical fault

**5<sup>th</sup> October:** Following a technical glitch in the UK’s testing system that saw nearly 16,000 COVID-19 cases go unreported in England, the Health Secretary Matt Hancock [conceded](#) that the mistake “should never have happened”. The error meant that although those who tested positive were told about their results, they did not appear in the national figures until over the weekend. More alarmingly in terms of efforts to stem transmission, the error also results in contacts not being traced for these same tests.

The technical error was caused by oversized Microsoft Excel data files that were unable to be sent from NHS Test and Trace to Public Health England. The error itself was discovered on Friday night and has since been fixed. Attempting to minimise the political fallout, the Health Secretary said that the error has not substantially changed the Government’s assessment of the epidemic, and had not impacted the decisions on local action taken.

### New support launched for jobseekers

**5<sup>th</sup> October:** Work and Pensions Secretary Therese Coffey this week [announced](#) that jobseekers will be offered coaching and advice on moving into “growing sectors” as part of a £238 million employment programme. The Job Entry Targeted Support (JETS) Scheme is aimed at helping those out of work due to Covid-19 for three months.

The Department for Work and Pensions states that it is recruiting an additional 13,500 “work coaches” to deliver on the plans. The scheme is designed to ensure claimants have access to tailored, flexible support, enabling them to quickly return employment. It will see a number of providers offer a range of support, including CV and interview coaching. However, Labour have criticised the scheme, arguing that it is too little, too late.

### Devolved Nations

- **8<sup>th</sup> October:** The Scottish Government has [announced](#) a new package of financial flexibilities and extra funding for councils, to address financial pressures caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- **7<sup>th</sup> October:** The Welsh Government [announced](#) a new £8 million Tenancy Saver Loan scheme, to help tenants struggling with rent arrears due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- **6<sup>th</sup> October:** The Northern Irish executive [announced](#) a new Covid-19 Surge Planning Strategic Framework for Northern Ireland, ahead of what is expected to be a tough winter for the health service.
- **6<sup>th</sup> October:** Finance Ministers from across the UK’s various devolved governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland [issued](#) coordinated statements asking the UK Government for greater fiscal flexibility to “manage the implications of COVID-19, be permitted meaningful involvement in the Spending Review to enable planning of budgets and receive an assurance that lost EU funding will be replaced in full and brought under the control of Devolved Administrations.”

## Other news

- **8<sup>th</sup> October:** Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick [admitted](#) that local lockdowns are having a limited effect, following analysis showing that 19 out of 20 areas with local restrictions have seen cases increase.
- **8<sup>th</sup> October:** The Greek islands of Lesbos, Santorini, Serifos, Tinos and Zakynthos have been added to the list of travel corridors for England. No countries have been removed from the list this week.
- **7<sup>th</sup> October:** With Covid-19 cases rising nationally again, the number of people [admitted](#) to hospital in one day with COVID-19 jumped by nearly a quarter in England (478 people) on Sunday.
- **2<sup>nd</sup> October:** New [statistics](#) from the NHS Test and Trace programme have shown that 1 in 8 people in England have now received a COVID-19 test at least once since the launch of the Test and Trace system on 28 May.

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