**London (CNN)** On Monday, Boris Johnson placed English citizens at the centre of an experiment that will give some indication of how well a highly populated country with surging cases of Covid-19 copes [when lockdown restrictions are lifted.](https://cnn.com/2021/07/05/uk/england-covid-gamble-gbr-intl/index.html)

In Johnson's favour, [most of the UK's adult population](https://cnn.com/2021/06/14/uk/boris-johnson-lockdown-extended-intl-gbr-analysis-cmd/index.html) is now double vaccinated. However, while those vaccinations have cut the numbers of people suffering from severe illness and succumbing to the disease after more than 128,000 deaths, the number of cases [is rising](https://cnn.com/2021/07/09/health/delta-variant-trends-israel-uk/index.html). There is also scant evidence that vaccines prevent the worst effects of long Covid in those who become infected.

Despite Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland -- the other, less populous, nations of the UK -- also being highly vaccinated, it is only England that is taking this leap on Monday.

Almost all of the remaining coronavirus-related restrictions in England had been lifted as of Monday. Mandatory mask-wearing is gone, limits on the numbers of people who can mix indoor or outdoor have been ended, social distancing will be limited to people who have tested positive for the virus and airports, and venues like nightclubs and sports stadiums are free to open at full capacity.

As midnight struck on Monday, thousands across England flocked to nightclubs for the first time since they closed back in March 2020. As it's no longer a legal requirement to prove one's Covid-19 status before entering such venues, the nation now waits to learn whether the end of restrictions will plunge the nation into an unprecedented wave of infection.



People hit the dance floor at The Piano Works in London early Monday.

If someone is pinged by the NHS coronavirus track-and-trace app, they will still need to self-isolate until August 16, at which point double-vaccinated people will be free to carry on as normal.

As cases continue to rise rapidly in England, the number of people told by the app to self-isolate is ballooning. In the week to July 7, 520,000 people received the alert, sparking worries about the program's impact on the economy.

Even Johnson himself wasn't spared by the track-and-trace scheme. The Prime Minister and Chancellor Rishi Sunak were alerted after coming into contact with the Health Secretary Sajid Javid, who tested positive for the coronavirus on Saturday.

Downing Street initially announced that instead of self-isolating, the two would take part in a "daily contact-testing pilot," a scheme that is unavailable to the general public. However, just hours later and following public outrage, officials made a U-turn on the decision and said the two would self-isolate after all.



Boris Johnson insists that the success of the vaccine rollout means restrictions can be lifted despite rising cases.

It's not the first gamble the PM has taken during the pandemic: He ended a lockdown on December 2 having pledged people a normal Christmas, a promise he would ultimately break when he was forced to reimpose restrictions. During the summer of 2020, the government actively encouraged a completely unvaccinated public to get back into pubs and restaurants, going so far as offering financial incentives to do so. And he opted to go it alone and not join European partners in procuring vaccines, a decision that initially looked set to pay off as the UK raced ahead of its neighbours in jabbing people.

[Johnson has defended his latest decision](https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-at-coronavirus-press-conference-5-july-2021) on the grounds that the increase in cases was "predicted." Where in the past such data would lead a government to "normally be locking down further," he said earlier this month, the "continuing effectiveness of the vaccine roll-out" means he is confident English people can be given their long-awaited "freedom day" on July 19.

Johnson admitted that this would mean reconciling "ourselves sadly to more deaths from Covid." But, he added, "if we can't reopen our society in the next few weeks, when we will be helped by the arrival of summer and by the school holidays, then we must ask ourselves when will we be able to return to normal?"