

# UK records lowest daily virus death toll since start of lockdown

June 1 2020

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This scanning electron microscope image shows SARS-CoV-2 (yellow)—also known as 2019-nCoV, the virus that causes COVID-19—isolated from a patient, emerging from the surface of cells (blue/pink) cultured in the lab. Credit: NIAID-RML

Younger children went back to schools in England on Monday as Britain

began to stir back to life, while the government reported the lowest coronavirus death toll since the start of the national lockdown in late March.

Outdoor markets also swung open their gates and car showrooms tried to lure back customers and recoup losses suffered since Britain effectively shut down for business to ward off a disease that has now officially claimed 39,045 lives in the country.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said Britain was making "significant progress" against the virus after its daily toll dropped to 111—the lowest since the stay-at-home order was issued on March 23.

Reporting of virus cases and fatalities is often lower after a weekend and many people still appeared hesitant to start using public transport or shop.

"It's very different from usual," Danish Londoner John Jellesmark said on a visit to the usually bustling Camden Market in the north of the capital.

"It's still pretty slow. It looks like the market is basically waking up."

## **Too much, too soon?**

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has set out a timeline that allows two million younger children in England to return to school on Monday and older ones from June 15.

The devolved governments in Scotland and Northern Ireland are eyeing a return in August and September, while Wales is still weighing the benefits of human contact against the dangers of children catching the disease and bringing it home.

A survey conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research found that primary school leaders expect about half the families to keep their children home.

Principal Claire Syms at the Halley House School in east London said children who do turn up need to feel comfortable in an unfamiliar setting where the desks are spaced out and many around them wear masks.

"We've been really conscious about keeping things as normal and as consistent as we can for our children," Syms told AFP.

"We're really mindful of their wellbeing and their mental health."

The UK government has been encouraged by the positive experience of other European countries that have started to return to something resembling normal life.

The House of Commons will debate a government push to get everyone to start voting in person instead of remotely when parliament returns from a break on Tuesday.

But critics of the easing believe the so-called R rate of transmission—estimated nationally at between 0.7 and 0.9—was still dangerously close to the 1.0 figure above which the virus' spread grows.

## **'Unenforceable'**

Scientists and lawmakers are not the only ones to express concern that the government's "cautious and phased" reopening is moving too quickly.

"We're only able to take these steps because of what we have achieved together so far," finance minister Rishi Sunak said as he toured

Tachbrook Market in central London.

London's Metropolitan Police Federation chairman Ken Marsh said current rules such as those allowing people to gather in groups of six in England were unenforceable.

"I don't think the public are taking much notice of what is laid down in front of them," Marsh told The Daily Telegraph. "They are doing it how they want to do it."

English parks and beaches have been inundated with people over two successive May weekends that came on the sunniest month ever recorded in Britain.

Police had warned after seeing growing numbers ignore social distancing measures a week ago that they were serious about sanctioning those who gather in large groups.

But some London parks looked like one giant party on Sunday and police issued just a tiny fraction of the fines they had handed out before people were allowed to leave their homes more freely on May 13.

"Policing have told the government that unless it's a huge gathering, it's pretty much unenforceable now," a senior police source told The Daily Telegraph.

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