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Covid in Scotland: PM says furlough available for future lockdowns

🕒 2 November 2020 · 💬 Comments



Covid in Scotland: First minister faces 'dilemma' over lockdown decision

The furlough scheme will be available if there is a Covid-19 lockdown in Scotland in the future, the prime minister has suggested.

Boris Johnson announced an extension of the job support scheme to 2 December as tough measures were imposed in England.

Nicola Sturgeon said decisions on any Scottish lockdown may depend on when this funding would be available.

Mr Johnson has now told MPs that the furlough scheme would "continue to be available wherever it is needed".

Ms Sturgeon said this would be "very welcome" - but added she was "seeking urgent confirmation from the Treasury that it will be exactly as we asked for".

- **What are the new Covid rules where you live?**

A new five-level system of coronavirus restrictions came into force in Scotland on Monday.

At her daily briefing, Ms Sturgeon said she would "ideally" want to assess the impact of the latest measures before deciding whether it would be necessary to impose harsher measures.

She said there were "some encouraging signs" that restrictions were having an impact in Scotland, with the rate of increase in cases "slowing down".



PA MEDIA

| Boris Johnson was questioned on the issue in the Commons

However, she said the position remained "very fragile" - and that she faced a "dilemma" about imposing stricter measures in the short-term if there was a

time limit on the furlough scheme.

She said: "I made clear last week that we might yet have to go further and we can't rule out a move to level four for all parts of the country.

"While that decision would never be easy, there is no doubt that the availability of a more extensive furlough scheme would make it slightly less difficult, because workers would have more of their wages paid.

"The decision we have to weigh up is should we take the opportunity of more generous financial support to step harder on the brakes now, to drive down infections."

She added: "It cannot be right that the only time that additional financial support is made available is when the south of England needs to go into a lockdown. That just isn't fair given the situation we are dealing with."

Key differences between levels in Scotland

LEVEL 0 - Nearly normal

Indoor meetings allowed – maximum eight people from three households

Fifteen people from five households can meet outdoors

LEVEL 1 - Medium

Restrictions on indoor meetings between households continue

In time, level 1 will allow people to meet in each other's homes, in groups of up to 6 people, from a maximum of 2 households

LEVEL 2 - High

No indoor meeting with other households

Six people from two households can meet outdoors and in hospitality settings

Pubs, bars and restaurants permitted to sell alcohol indoors only with a main meal - and only until 8pm

LEVEL 3 - Very High

Alcohol sales not permitted indoors or outdoors. Cafes, pubs and restaurants are allowed to open until 6pm to serve food and non-alcoholic drinks

LEVEL 4 - Lockdown

Closer to a full lockdown of the type the UK went into at the end of March, with non-essential shops, hospitality and some all

end of March, with non-essential shops, hospitality and gyms all being forced to close

Some outdoor meeting still allowed

Schools will stay open



Wales has been in a "firebreak" lockdown since 23 October, and First Minister Mark Drakeford said requests to boost wage subsidies there **had been repeatedly turned down.**

Calls for more flexibility over furlough were backed by Scottish Conservative leader Douglas Ross, who said in a speech on Monday morning that "this has to be cleared up, now".

He said: "It cannot be that furlough is not affordable when Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland or parts of Northern England need to go into lockdown - but when all of England goes into lockdown, the taps are turned on.

"We all hope that by following the guidance and doing the right thing, a second Scottish lockdown will not be necessary.

"But if it is, the UK government must treat Scotland the same way as England."

If this bears out, it is v welcome. However [@scotgov](#) seeking urgent confirmation from Treasury that it will be exactly as we asked for - furlough beyond 2 December, non time-limited and on same basis as available through Nov, inc on eligibility and 80% wages paid
<https://t.co/NWWjM5r56o>
— Nicola Sturgeon (@NicolaSturgeon) November 2, 2020

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Repeatedly questioned about the matter in the Commons, Mr Johnson said that the job support scheme applied across the UK.

He initially refused to be drawn about whether this could continue to be the case beyond December, should local lockdowns be needed in other parts of the UK.

However, he then appeared to confirm that this would be the case when asked by Mr Ross to "explain why it seems an English job is more important than a Welsh, Scottish or Northern Irish one".

The prime minister said: "If other parts of the UK decide to go into measures which require the furlough scheme then of course that is available to them - that applies not just now but in the future."

Pressed on the question by SNP MP Pete Wishart, he added: "The furlough scheme will continue to be available wherever it is needed."

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