

COVID-19: Christmas shoppers flood high streets in return after lockdown

London's Regent Street was busy with shoppers, but numbers were still down on last year.

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People flooded Regent Street on Saturday



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Christmas shoppers flooded England's high streets for the first weekend since lockdown was lifted and non-essential stores were allowed to reopen.

Despite the difficulties of the pandemic, retail experts predicted £1.5bn would be spent in shops nationwide on Saturday.

Taking advantage of the first non-working day to do their Christmas shopping, people flooded London's Regent Street and city centres in **Manchester** and York.

Shoppers visiting Westfield, east **London** and stores in central **Birmingham** had to contend with hundreds of anti-lockdown protesters staging demonstrations against more potential restrictions next year.



Customers took advantage of price drops at Debenhams, which is closing after falling into administration



Crowds in shopping in London. Pic: Karen Ellis

Several shops have continued their Black Friday sales in the hope of enticing more customers, with reductions of up to 80% at Sir Philip Green's Arcadia stores, which went into administration this week, risking 13,000 jobs.

Shoppers were also seen taking advantage of price drops at Debenhams, which is expected to close at the expense of 12,000 jobs after it failed to find a buyer.

Figures from the British Retail Consortium show High Street footfall was up 150% when lockdown lifted in England on Wednesday - compared with the week before, when only essential shops were open.

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Shoppers at Westfield in Stratford, east London, had to contend with lockdown protesters as well

But customer numbers were still 26% lower than what they were in 2019.

Despite queues outside, an employee at Hamleys famous toy store said this year was a "blip" and that he hoped customer levels would return to normal in 2021.

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London Mayor Sadiq Khan was out on the streets of the West End on Saturday

London Mayor Sadiq Khan was out showing support for retailers in the West End.

Mr Khan told Sky News: "Our shops have had a really rotten eight or nine months. This month is known as the golden month.

"I'm encouraging people to shop safely and shop in London.

"It's really important that we support our shops at this difficult time. These shops need us. If we don't support them, don't be surprised if some of them close down."

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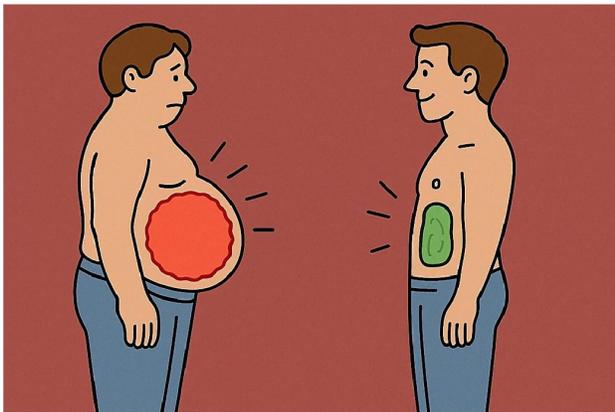
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