

GOVERNMENT

Europe moves towards reopening as delta variant looms

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U.K. travelers are no longer banned from visiting Germany. Image credit: Walpole, Heathrow Airport

By LUXURY DAILY NEWS SERVICE

Some countries in Europe are easing COVID-19 restrictions, despite cases and hospitalizations climbing, particularly among unvaccinated populations.

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The United Kingdom will decide in the coming days whether to proceed into the next phase of reopening on July 19, while Germany is relaxing restrictions on travelers from the U.K. and four other "variant-hit" countries. Governments continue to push for vaccinations as the more infectious delta variant becomes the dominant strain of COVID-19.

Changing circumstances

On July 12, the U.K. will decide whether to move into step four of its reopening on July 19.

Under step four, the government will lift restrictions on social contact, large events and closed settings, such as nightclubs, in England. Mask mandates will also end, although face mask use will still be encouraged.

Employers will also be permitted to begin returning to workplaces and the government will no longer instruct residents to work from home.

Although the U.K. is expected to continue its transition out of lockdown, it will continue promoting vaccinations, testing, contact tracing and other contingency measures to manage COVID-19. However, the government also acknowledges that cases, hospitalizations and deaths will rise as the economy reopens because of the dominant and highly infectious delta variant.



Businesses in the U.K. have endured several rounds of lockdowns. Image credit: Harods

"Lifting restrictions does not mean that the risks from COVID-19 have disappeared," the Cabinet Office said in a [statement](#). "Instead, it marks a new phase in the government's response to the pandemic during which people need to manage the risks to themselves and others as the country learns to live with the virus."

More than [45.4 million people in the U.K.](#), about 86 percent of the adult population, have received their first vaccination. People are considered to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 two weeks after their final dose, with some vaccinations requiring two-shot regimens.

Meanwhile, effective July 7, [Germany is lifting restrictions](#) on travelers from the U.K., Portugal, Russia, India and Nepal and will no longer require fully vaccinated visitors from the "virus variant" countries to quarantine. German citizens will also no longer be required to quarantine after visiting those countries, which are now considered "high incidence areas."

In Spain's Catalonia region, including Barcelona, the regional government is [reimposing COVID-19 restrictions](#) including closing nightclubs and requiring proof of vaccination for attendees of outdoor events involving more than 500 people. Spain stopped requiring outdoor use of masks in late June, but the country's infection rate has increased since, particularly among young people who have lower rates of vaccinations.

According to the World Health Organization, COVID-19 vaccines are effective against different strains of the virus, including the delta variant. Governments continue emphasizing vaccination campaigns in the hopes of avoiding more widespread lockdowns that may continue jeopardizing tenuous economic recoveries ([see story](#)).

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