

Faced with growing questioning about whether its approach to containment was working, and evidence that a proportion of the UK population was not responding adequately to previous advice, the UK Government became the latest to tighten its COVID-19 restrictions substantially. PM Boris Johnson addressed the nation on the evening of 23 March, and announced the following [restrictions](#) on commercial and community activity.

All non essential retail, hospitality, entertainment, sports and recreation, and places of assembly (places of worship, libraries, community centres) must close. The only **exceptions** are supermarkets and other food shops, health shops, pharmacies, petrol stations, bicycle shops, home and hardware shops, laundrettes and dry cleaners, garages, car rentals, pet shops, corner shops, newsagents, post offices, and banks. The Government asks that online and takeaway services to continue to operate.

In addition, the Government announced [restrictions](#) on personal movement, stopping all public gatherings of more than two people (except for members of the same household, and essential workplace gatherings), and requiring people to remain at home with four limited exceptions:

- shopping for basic necessities, as infrequently as possible,
- exercise, once a day and only with members of your household,
- medical need or caring for a vulnerable person, and
- travelling to and from work, but only where this cannot be done from home

Previous guidance on social distancing remains, in the workplace, in shops that remain open, and outside.

What Does This Mean For My Business?

There is no requirement for businesses other than those [listed](#) to close. For those businesses listed, failure to close can be sanctioned by prohibition notices and unlimited fines.

Other businesses, such as manufacture, production, packaging and distribution facilities can remain open. But the personal movement measures mean that only those who cannot work remotely can attend the workplace, and social distancing must be observed wherever possible.

We further advise:

- out of prudence, and in line with the Government's objectives, also to restrict those attending the workplace only to those essential to the operation of that unit: we advise that you consider suspending all non-essential functions, including those that cannot be done remotely; and
- all employees whose presence at the workplace is essential should be given a letter explaining the need for their presence. There is currently no requirement to carry justifications for leaving the home (as for example in France), but employees may be challenged on their way to work and such letters would help them to feel confident that they can attend the workplace, and to respond to any challenge.

Where Does The UK Now Stand Against Other Countries?

The UK has not announced a general economic shut-down, as Italy has, and as US States are putting in place. Though the means of implementation differ from country to country, the effect of the measures announced on 23 March brings the UK broadly into line with other major European economies, such as Germany, France and Spain.

Contact

Matthew Kirk

International Affairs Advisor, London
T +44 20 7655 1389
E matthew.kirk@squirepb.com

Matthew Kirk is a career diplomat, who served as the UK's Ambassador to Finland and most recently, served as external affairs director at Vodafone Group. He is a highly experienced international risk strategist and negotiator of complex multinational issues. He supports our lawyers in helping clients find practical solutions to externally driven challenges.