# Reflecting on five years since the UK's first coronavirus lockdown



As the UK marks the fifth anniversary of its first coronavirus lockdown, a reflective lens is cast over the extraordinary measures that became part of everyday life during the pandemic. On the evening of March 23, 2020, following an exceptionally busy weekend at beaches and tourist attractions, former Prime Minister Boris Johnson addressed the nation, unveiling stringent measures aimed at curbing the spread of Covid-19.

In this initial announcement, Johnson instructed all non-essential retailers to close their doors immediately, following the earlier closure of pubs. Members of the public were urged to stay at home unless they were shopping for necessities or exercising outdoors. Key social distancing guidelines were established, requiring individuals to maintain at least two metres apart, and gatherings of more than two people from different households were strictly prohibited. To enforce these measures, police received enhanced powers to maintain public safety during these unprecedented times.

The measures saw further escalation with two additional national lockdowns, as Covid precautions remained in place until restrictions were wholly lifted in England on February 24, 2022, coinciding with the government's announcement of a 'living with Covid' strategy.

Throughout this tumultuous period, a range of unique behaviours and adaptations became commonplace. Face masks transitioned from simple medical wear to fashion statements, as individuals began donning glitzy, elaborate designs that matched their outfits. What was once merely a protective measure is now viewed as a peculiar addition to the social landscape.

Another memorable feature of the lockdown experience was the weekly clapping sessions for the NHS and key workers. This practice began as a spontaneous show of support on March 26, three days after the initial lockdown, and it quickly evolved into a nationwide ritual. Communities observed this act of solidarity every Thursday for ten weeks, showcasing the collective appreciation for those on the front lines during the crisis.

Social distancing mandates prompted innovative greeting methods, replacing traditional handshakes and kisses with elbow bumps and footshakes—interactions that now seem almost comical. Supermarkets implemented one-way shopping systems to reduce close contact, making the once routine task of grocery shopping a strategic endeavour.

To facilitate testing while reducing the risk of virus transmission, drive-through testing centres were established nationwide, allowing individuals to receive their Covid-19 tests from the safety of their vehicles. The testing procedure, which required a nasal swab and throat samples, is now remembered as an unusual but necessary strategy to manage the virus spread.

As virtual interactions increased, platforms like Zoom became synonymous with social gatherings, notably through the rise of online quizzes which allowed friends and families to connect despite physical restrictions. These quizzes became integral to maintaining relationships in a time of social isolation.

Meanwhile, the introduction of QR code check-ins at venues marked a new era in restaurant and bar experiences, designed for contact tracing in case of virus exposure. This process, now absent from daily routines, required patrons to log their visits to assist in managing public health situations.

Overall, the past five years have been characterised by a profound transformation in social behaviours, community engagement, and public health strategies in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. As the UK reflects on these experiences, many of the adaptations that became our 'new normal' serve as a testament to the resilience and ingenuity of society during a period of significant challenge.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)