

The Spring 2021 roadmap to recovery, thoughts on where this leaves event organisers

Introduction

As we approach April, Christmas and the second wave of Covid seem to be behind us with levelling infection rates, although plateauing and the vaccine rollout progressing well. New variants caused problems in the New Year with a 'UK coronavirus variant' first identified in London and the south east spreading across the UK with increased transmissibility, followed by further strains including South African and Brazil variants.

On 22nd February 2021 the Government published the roadmap out of the current lockdown, titled 'Covid-19 response – Spring 2021'. This document maps the path out of lockdown outlining 4 steps for easing restrictions, with indicative dates attached to each of these steps. Before proceeding with each step the Government has four tests based on available data that must be met, these are:-

- a. The vaccine deployment programme continues successfully.
- b. Evidence shows vaccines are sufficiently effective in reducing hospitalisations and deaths in those vaccinated.
- c. Infection rates do not risk a surge in hospitalisations which would put unsustainable pressure on the NHS.
- d. The assessment of the risks is not fundamentally changed by new Variants of Concern.

It is worth strongly noting that the above tests must be met and that the dates specified, which the media and many have presented as absolute are indicative, and the earliest possibility. This is important to stress to manage expectations. It is also worth noting that vaccines are at the heart of the strategy, with the UK deploying the most ambitious vaccination programme in history.

The wider picture around events

Where does this leave the events industry, moving into spring, summer and autumn 2021? Unfortunately although the roadmap contains much detail, the wider picture is far from clear with policy decisions made often being short notice, not giving supply chains time to gear up or suitable time for planning, and more importantly a Government backed Covid cancellation insurance scheme not forthcoming. Commercial insurers will most likely not cover and the majority of event organisers probably can't afford to take the risk, particularly with the lack of income since the 2019 season. Lastly, with cash flow issues and potential shortages of equipment and expertise the practicalities of putting on events may also be difficult.

What does the roadmap permit in relation to events?

Step 1a - from 8 March

England is still in a national lockdown. People must stay at home, leaving only where permitted by law, and follow the rules in government national lockdown guidance. Some of the rules on what people can and cannot do changed on 8 March including, people can spend time in outdoor public spaces for recreation on their own, with their household or support bubble, or with 1 other person.

Step 1b - From 29 March

Outdoor sport facilities can reopen for groups of up to 6 people or with members of up to 2 households.

Step 2 - no earlier than 12 April

Venues must only be used in line with the wider social contact limits- as a single household or bubble indoors; or in a group of 6 people or 2 households outdoors. Outdoor areas at hospitality venues can reopen, including for takeaway alcohol. These venues may allow customers to use toilets located inside. At any premises serving alcohol, customers will be required to order, be served and eat/drink while seated. Outdoor attractions can reopen. ***Outdoor gatherings or events, organised by a business, charity, public body or similar organisation, can be organised, subject to complying with COVID-Secure guidance including taking reasonable steps to limit the risk of transmission, complete a related risk assessment; and ensure that those attending do not mix beyond what is permitted by the social contact limits.*** This could enable spectators at a grassroots sports match or a village fete, provided people do not mix beyond groups of 6 people or 2 households. Further government guidance on outdoor events is forthcoming. ***Indoor events that bring people together- even if they do not mix with other households - must not run until Step 3.*** However, at this point, funerals can continue to proceed with up to 30 attendees. Weddings, receptions, and commemorative events including wakes will be able to take place with up to 15 attendees (in premises that are permitted to open). Non-essential retail can reopen.

Step 3 - no earlier than 17 May

Venues must only be used in line with the wider social contact limits - in a group of 6 people or 2 households indoors; or in a group of no more than 30 people outdoors. Indoor areas of hospitality venues can reopen. As with outdoors, table service will be required. Indoor entertainment and visitor attractions can reopen. ***Remaining outdoor entertainment events will also be permitted. Both outdoor and indoor gatherings or events, organised by a business, charity, public body or similar organisation can be organised, subject to them complying with COVID-Secure guidance including taking reasonable steps to limit the risk of transmission, complete a related risk assessment; and ensure that those attending do not mix beyond what is permitted by the social contact limits.*** Spectators will be allowed at elite sporting events and performance events. Attendance at these events will be restricted to 50% of capacity up to 1,000 people for indoor events, and 50% of capacity up to 4,000 people for outdoor events. For outdoor events taking place in venues with seated capacity of over 16,000, event organisers may apply a 25% capacity cap, up to a maximum of 10,000 seated people. Large business events will also be able to go ahead, subject to the same capacity requirements as sporting events and performances.

Step 4 - no earlier than 21 June

The intention at this stage is to reopen remaining settings such as nightclubs and adult entertainment venues. To lift the restrictions on social contact and large events that apply in Step 3. This is subject to the outcome of the Events Research Programme, and a review of social distancing measures. The Government will also look to relax COVID-Secure requirements on businesses, subject to the outcome of the reviews.

Where can I get further guidance?

We strongly refer event organisers to the Event Industry Forum guidance titled 'Keeping workers and audiences safe during COVID-19 In the Outdoor Event Industry in England, 1st March 2021'. This is the most up-to-date guidance available and is supported by DCMS.

We are awaiting the results of the events research programme to feedback from various pilot events taking place from April. The intention is for a range of pilot events to be held to test different settings at venues and events, with feedback being used to clarify policy ready for June.

Although the airborne risk of Covid-19 transmission is much lower outdoors than inside, the risk of infection via larger droplets remains high if people engage in prolonged, face-to-face close contact with others. Therefore, maintaining 2m distancing outdoors is still advisable. Outdoor surfaces may also still become contaminated with the virus, so it is also important to be mindful of what shared objects are touched, and to maintain regular hand washing.

Airborne transmission is a significant route by which Covid-19 passes between people. Particles of the virus can build up and circulate in the air in the form of aerosols in enclosed spaces (even if they are large) especially where air exchange is poor. This makes indoor settings more risky than outdoors, where the fresh air quickly disperses the virus to safe levels. This is confirmed by observational studies tracing people infected which shows the majority of transmission occurs in indoor settings and that 'super spreader' events (where many people are infected at one time) are more likely indoors than outdoors. For this reason, we expect some form of social distancing and mask wearing to remain potentially for the rest of the year.

What assistance can I get from Newham?

Newham continues to run Safety Advisory Groups (SAGs) for all events to support organisers and bring stakeholders together. We maintain a close working relationship with our public health team. We are awaiting more clarity on the roadmap and the feedback from pilot events, and also Public Health England guidance with the Association of Directors of Public Health on outdoor events. We continue to remind event organiser to engage with the SAG at their earliest convenience and that the focus remains on risk assessments and Event Management Plans covering the essentials including but not limited to ventilation, queue management, stopping crowds gathering, ingress/egress points and the implications on public transport for getting attendees to and from events.

Newham's Covid Dashboard remains a useful link for the most up to date picture in the borough. This can be found at the following link <https://www.newham.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/coviddashboard/1>.