

# *Worldwide coronavirus cases surpass 81.3 million amid fast spread of new variant*

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Washington, December 30 (RHC)-- The new coronavirus has now infected over 81.3 million people and killed more than 1.7 million others across the globe, according to Johns Hopkins University data. The new, more transmittable strain of the virus, which first emerged in the United Kingdom, also continues to spread, prompting border closures all around the world.

Cases of the mutated variant were confirmed in several European countries as the EU kicked off a campaign to vaccinate the bloc's 450 million people to defeat the viral pandemic. The distribution of an initial 200 million doses of the vaccine, developed by Pfizer and BioNTech, across the EU will be completed by September, according to a spokesman for the European Commission. The EU vaccination campaign began as several cases of the new variant were found in Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland — all linked to travelers from the UK.

The Independent Sage, a group of independent scientists in Britain, urged that all regions of England be placed in tier-4 lockdown, meaning that non-essential shops, hairdressers, and leisure and entertainment venues be closed.

Some 24 million people, more than 40 percent of the population, are already living under tier-4 restrictions in England. Lockdowns were introduced in Scotland and Northern Ireland, as well.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his scientific advisers warned last week that the nation would have a difficult time ahead as the new variant of the coronavirus spread rapidly in Britain. Several countries have already closed their borders to British travelers to stop the spread of the new variant.

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