

Pint could rise by 10p as pubs suffer Christmas cancellations

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The cost of a pint is expected to rise by 10p as pubs experience widespread cancellations of Christmas bookings because of concern about the Omicron variant and new coronavirus measures.

Some employers have insisted that their offices will stay open, despite Boris Johnson's call on Wednesday for people to work from home where possible.

Clive Watson, executive chairman of the City Pub Group, which has about 50 pubs, predicted that pints would increase by 10p to offset lost revenue from parties. "About ten days ago office parties started to get cancelled, particularly those office parties which were being funded by companies, so typically parties for 40 to 50 people," he told *Today* on BBC Radio 4. "After yesterday's announcement, that has accelerated."

Emma Sweet, marketing manager at the Brakspear group of pubs, said that its 130 premises had received hundreds of cancellations since the prime minister announced new restrictions. Of the nine houses it manages directly, there were 140 cancellations. "Usually you may get the odd one due to illness," she said. "Christmas parties can go ahead at

the moment and we're practising distancing to make sure people feel safe. You can't be cross with the people who want to cancel because you want them to feel safe and have a good time, but you just want things to carry on as normal."

Sweet added that landlords were caught between wanting to encourage parties and not "coming across as being glib". She said: "Everybody wants a second go at Christmas after last year."

City bosses such as Kevin Ellis of PwC said that they would keep offices open despite guidelines advising people to work from home from Monday. "The majority of our people had returned to the office two to three days a week," Ellis said. "It's the busy season for audit and there's also lots of deal activity that benefits from some in-person meetings."

Ellis, whose company employs 22,000 people, said that workers would be asked to take lateral flow tests when attending offices in 15 cities.

Slaughter and May, one of the biggest law firms, and the accounting business EY said that they had asked all staff to work from home "where possible".

Julian Bird, chief executive of the Society of London Theatre, said that the West End planned to remain open

and that plan B would be useful in getting people to wear masks, as theatre staff wanted them to do. He said: "All the studies say that sitting in a normal theatre is relatively safe. If you sit down in a regimented pattern then the risk is very low. It's different to last time. A large proportion of the population are willing to go out and lead their lives."

Luke Johnson, part-owner of the bakery chain Gail's, said his businesses had received numerous cancellations since Wednesday's announcement. He said on *The World at One* on BBC Radio 4: "Where does it end? Does it happen every single time there is a new variant and scientists get a little nervous?"

Schools were told that they would not receive visits from Ofsted inspectors until after the Christmas holidays.

● A shift to working at home by millions of Britons will cost city centres £3 billion a year in sales and put 77,000 jobs at risk, researchers at Sheffield University estimate. They suggest that the average UK worker expects to work from home for an extra day a week next year. The findings are based on more than 22,500 questionnaires answered between March and November by workers who earned at least £10,000.

