

French lockdown of population begins in bid to curtail coronavirus

March 17 2020



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A strict lockdown requiring most people in France to remain at home came into effect at midday Tuesday, prohibiting all but essential outings in a bid to curb the coronavirus spread.

The government has said tens of thousands of police will patrol streets

and issuing fines of 38 to 135 euros (\$42-\$150) for people without a written declaration to justify their reasons for being out.

President Emmanuel Macron announced the measure Monday night in an address that was viewed by 35 million people, "an absolute record for a televised intervention," according to a spokesman for the Mediametre audience measuring group.

The country has reported 148 deaths from the virus, a number that health experts warn could soar in the coming days, seriously straining the hospital system.

Macron said that under the new regime, gatherings among friends and family would no longer be allowed, only "necessary movements" like shopping, medical visits or working when tele-commuting was not possible.

Schools have been closed since Monday.

But Health Minister Olivier Veran said Tuesday that self-confinement rules could be eased in two weeks if the spread of the new coronavirus is sufficiently contained.

"If in two weeks we see that things have calmed down enough and we can lift some of these confinement rules, we'll do it," Veran told France Inter radio.

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Citation: French lockdown of population begins in bid to curtail coronavirus (2020, March 17) retrieved 15 July 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-03-french-lockdown-population-curtail-coronavirus.html>

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