

# French virus lockdown relaxed... in the Pacific

April 20 2020

---

New Caledonia, a Pacific archipelago thousands of kilometres from mainland France, on Monday become the first French territory to ease a lockdown imposed to combat the coronavirus.

With 18 confirmed cases of COVID-19 to date, and no new cases since April 4, [local authorities](#) last week announced a gradual lifting of confinement measures which entered into force on March 24.

Shops, service providers and companies reopened their doors Monday, but not bars, discos, cinemas or gyms. No relaxation is due in mainland France until May 11.

In the south of the territory, which houses the capital Noumea and 75 percent of New Caledonia's population, schools will reopen Wednesday with classes divided into two groups.

School will resume on May 4 in the north.

Like the rest of France's overseas departments which stretch from the Atlantic to the Pacific, New Caledonia's inhabitants hold French passports, vote in national elections and send MPs to the parliament in Paris.

A landmark 1988 deal between France and opponents and supporters of independence, gave the islands more autonomy.

It is due to hold a second referendum on independence later this year after voters in a November 2018 poll chose to remain part of France.

The archipelago is some 16,000 kilometres (almost 10,000 miles) from mainland France, where lockdown started on March 17 in a bid to halt [coronavirus](#) spread. All non-essential movement is prohibited until May 11.

The relaxation of confinement in New Caledonia is not universally popular, with the Customary Senate—an assembly of traditional councils of the indigenous Kanak nation—coming out against the move Monday in a statement deeming it "hasty and without sufficient preparation".

For his part, Daniel Goa, the president of the pro-independence Caledonian Union party, has urged two more weeks of confinement "to verify the absence of the virus in the population".

Air traffic has been suspended since March 20, and no decision has yet been taken to resume it.

© 2020 AFP

Citation: French virus lockdown relaxed... in the Pacific (2020, April 20) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-04-french-virus-lockdown-pacific.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--