

Switzerland speeds up lifting of virus restrictions

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The Swiss government said Wednesday it would speed up easing the restrictions imposed to control the coronavirus pandemic, allowing restaurants to open again on May 11.

"We are in a new phase and we must learn to live with the virus," Swiss President Simonetta Sommaruga told a press conference in Bern.

Switzerland stopped short of imposing full confinement in March but most shops and services closed down.

On Monday, hairdressers, garden centres, hardware stores and doctors' surgeries reopened again in the [first stage](#) of easing the controls.

On May 11 schools can reopen, along with shops and markets in the second stage.

Professional and amateur sports clubs can resume training and [public transport](#) will operate to normal schedules.

But while those measures had already been announced, the [government](#) sprung a surprise in announcing that restaurants, museums and libraries could reopen on the same date.

The government said it was "relatively easy" to apply physical distancing and hand hygiene rules in such establishments and control the flow of people.

The restrictions were also eased "more quickly than previously anticipated" because the spread of the virus was stable, said Health Minister Alain Berset.

In restaurants, up to four people can sit at the same table, though parents can sit with more children. Tables must be two metres apart.

Wearing masks is not obligatory in Switzerland, though it is recommended if physical distancing cannot be guaranteed.

The [virus](#) has killed more than 1,400 people in the Alpine nation.

A third series of restrictions is due to be eased on May 27.

In the meantime, gatherings of more than five people remain banned and [border controls](#) will remain in place.

Gatherings of more than 1,000 people are prohibited until the end of August.

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