

WHO urges stricter measures as Belarus virus cases surge

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The World Health Organisation on Saturday warned Belarus that the coronavirus epidemic is on a "rapid increase", a sign its soft approach to containing the spread has not worked.

On a mission to the country of 9.5 million, one of the few in Europe without a mandatory lockdown, Dr. Patrick O'Connor of the WHO's European office said there is "evidence of rapid increase in cases" in Belarus.

"Case counts have doubled about every two to three days, indicating the beginning of community transmission," he said during a press-conference in Minsk, warning that the situation "warrants new measures."

Belarus on Saturday reported 2,226 cases of infection and 23 fatalities. The country's [health minister](#) said that hundreds of those cases were healthcare workers.

"Laboratory testing confirms that 301 [healthcare workers](#) have been infected," minister Vladimir Karanik said at the joint conference.

Belarus "hasn't focused" on preventing healthcare-associated transmission, O'Connor said, though he praised efforts to repurpose private sector industry for domestic production of protective gear for medics.

He said the WHO is recommending increased "isolation measures", particularly postponing mass gatherings and sports events.

Belarus has drawn attention by continuing to stage football matches—the only country in Europe to do so. Minister Karanik on Saturday said it was not up to the [health ministry](#) to stop the championship.

President Alexander Lukashenko has previously prioritised the economy over quarantine, saying the country cannot afford such a lockdown.

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