

Belgium to reopen shops under social distancing May 11

May 6 2020



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Belgium retailers closed by the coronavirus epidemic will reopen to shoppers from Monday under strict social distancing rules, Prime Minister Sophie Wilmes said.

Customers will be advised to remain apart and to wear masks when the stores open on May 11 but, in their [private lives](#), Belgians will be allowed to enjoy a little more [social life](#) from Sunday.

From then, Wilmes said, households will be allowed to invite over a group of up to four friends or relatives, on condition that it is always the same four people.

Sunday is Mother's Day in Belgium, but Wilmes said the decision had not been made for that reason, rather because "physical distancing from our loved ones has become unbearable".

With one of the highest per capita death rates in the world from the virus, Belgium began lifting a strict lockdown in stages this week.

Some businesses whose staff are not in contact with the public have already re-started work, but schools, restaurants and bars will remain closed a while longer.

And on [public transport](#), passengers have been instructed to wear protective face masks of the kind that have become ubiquitous on the streets of Brussels.

When the shops do open they must ensure there's enough space for each client to occupy 10 square metres (yards) and to remain 1.5 metres away from staff.

Belgium's schools may see a gradual return from May 18, but decisions will be made by the linguistic communities—French, Dutch and German—that manage them.

More than 8,300 people from a population of 11.5 million have died in the epidemic, but the daily toll is falling along with new admissions to

hospitals, which were hard pressed but not overwhelmed.

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