

70 cases of COVID-19 at French schools days after re-opening

May 18 2020, by Thomas Adamson



In this May 14, 2020 file photo, Children wash their hands at the Saint-Tronc Castelroc primary school in Marseille, southern France. Just days after around a third of French schoolchildren went back to school, ended the gruelling coronavirus-linked lockdown, there has been flare up of about 70 cases with coronavirus in classes. (AP Photo/Daniel Cole, File)

Just one week after a third of French schoolchildren went back to school in an easing of the coronavirus lockdown, there has been a worrying flareup of about 70 COVID-19 cases linked to schools, the government said Monday.

Some lower grades in schools were opened last week and a further 150,000 junior high students went back to the classroom Monday as further restrictions were loosened by the government. The move initially spelled relief: the end of homeschooling for hundreds of thousands of exhausted French parents, many of whom were also working from home.

But French Education minister Jean-Michel Blanquer sounded the alarm Monday, telling French radio RTL that the return has put some children in new danger of infection. He said the affected schools are being closed immediately. French media reported that seven schools in northern France were closed.

The situation highlights the precarious situation the French government finds itself in as it seeks both to reassure the public that the country is moving forward past coronavirus and to react prudently to safeguard public health.

Blanquer did not specify if the 70 cases of COVID-19 were among students or teachers.

Given that the incubation period for the virus is several days, people are "likely" to have been infected before the reopening of the schools, he said.



In this May 14, 2020 file photo, schoolchildren raise their fingers to answer their teacher Sandrine Albiez, wearing a face masks, in a school in Strasbourg, eastern France. Just days after around a third of French schoolchildren went back to school, ended the gruelling coronavirus-linked lockdown, there has been flare up of about 70 cases with coronavirus in classes. (AP Photo/Jean-Francois Badias, File)

France reopened about 40,000 preschools and primary schools last week, with classes capped at 15 students.

About 30% of children went back to school, Blanquer said. The government has allowed parents to keep children at home.

This week France is reopening junior high schools in regions less

affected by the virus, which do not include Paris.

Although the idea of children being silent "super-spreaders" has been largely debunked in recent analyses, last week France recorded its first death of a child linked to Kawasaki disease, a mysterious inflammatory syndrome that some doctors say could be triggered by COVID-19.

The 9-year-old boy in Marseille was one of 125 children in France currently with the syndrome.

French authorities have reported at least 142,411 people infected with the coronavirus and 28,108 deaths.



In this May 14, 2020 file photo, a child walks in her classroom as others wait outside at the Vaucanson school, in Paris. Just days after around a third of

French schoolchildren went back to school, ended the gruelling coronavirus-linked lockdown, there has been flare up of about 70 cases with coronavirus in classes. (AP Photo/Thibault Camus, File)

In neighboring Germany, schools have been slowly opening to various degrees for about two weeks now, subject to precautions.

No major outbreaks related to the reopenings have been reported, though there have been many individual cases. In Berlin's Spandau neighborhood, one school was ordered temporarily closed at the weekend after it emerged that a teacher with COVID-19 had contact with two elementary classes, an after-school care program and other teachers.

A teacher from another school in the area also tested positive, but only had contact with a small number of children. Those individuals were ordered into quarantine but the school has remained open, the BZ newspaper reported on Monday. In the surrounding state of Brandenburg two kindergartens were closed and a fifth-grade class at an elementary school were quarantined.

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