

France reports lowest recent virus toll ahead of easing

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France on Sunday reported 70 more deaths from the coronavirus, its lowest daily toll in recent weeks just ahead of the first easing of an almost two-month lockdown.

The new deaths brought the total toll in hospitals and nursing homes from the pandemic in France to 26,380, the health ministry said.

It was the lowest daily toll announced since March 17, the day the lockdown in France began. Saturday had also seen a record low toll of 80 deaths.

France will on Monday emerge from its lockdown, although many restrictions will remain in place nationwide.

"Our efforts during the lockdown worked and saved thousands of lives," said the health ministry.

"They need to succeed so that this new phase succeeds," it added, warning that the epidemic is still "active and evolving".

There has been a steady downward trend in France's key coronavirus figures in recent days, although officials warn that caution is still needed and the risk of a second wave remains.

Continuing recent trends, there were 36 fewer coronavirus patients in total in intensive care for a total of 2,776 and 45 less in hospital for a total of 22,569 people.

The government has divided France into green and red areas for Monday's easing of the lockdown, with Paris and three other regions classified as red seeing a more limited relaxation.

The main differences for the French this week will be schools reopening and people no longer having to write or download certificates to show police to justify trips outside.

However such certificates will still be needed for trips of over 100

kilometres (60 miles) from home.

More rigorous measures are still being kept in Paris due to the active circulation of the virus, with parks and large shopping centres to remain closed.

In a special measure for the French capital to ensure public transport is not overcrowded, commuters will have to carry a certificate from their employer if they travel during peak hours in the morning and evening.

Wearing masks is to be obligatory on public transport and state railway operator SNCF is readying for passengers to return to its stations with a myriad of circles and arrows being placed on the ground of concourses to ensure people observe social distancing.

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