

# Finland entering 'second stage' of pandemic

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The spread of the novel coronavirus is accelerating in Finland, health officials warned on Thursday, as the country introduced new controls on arrivals from some EU countries.

Belgium, the Netherlands and Andorra were removed from Finland's green travel list, putting a stop to tourists arriving from those countries and imposing a 14-day quarantine on other returnees.

Further containment measures within Finland would be unveiled next week, officials said.

According to new estimates, the reproduction rate of the virus has now risen above 1, to between 1.1 and 1.4, the health ministry's strategic

director Liisa-Maria Voipio-Pulkki told a press conference.

"The situation is extremely delicate," Voipio-Pulkki said, adding that "some sort of second stage has begun."

"Whether we can expect a smaller wave or a larger wave depends on how we respond."

## **Autumn roadmap**

Despite the upturn in cases, Finland still has Europe's lowest incidence rate, reporting two new cases per 100,000 people in the last 14 days.

So far 7,532 COVID-19 infections and 331 deaths have been reported in the Nordic nation of 5.5 million people, and the number of new cases slowed to a trickle during June and early July.

Most of the springtime lockdown restrictions have been lifted, with large indoor and outdoor gatherings permitted, restaurants and bars open as normal and children due to return to in-classroom teaching next week after the summer holidays.

Officials said an "autumn roadmap" will be published next week, setting out the new measures to be introduced if the virus continues to spread.

These may include localised lockdown measures, and for the first time a recommendation to wear face masks.

Authorities have so far opposed face coverings, arguing that there is insufficient evidence of their effectiveness.

Although the rise in new cases is still comparatively small, the new phase of the virus appears to be affecting under-30s much more than in the

spring, when it was most prevalent among older people, figures show.

This is partly due to younger people having spent more time socialising over the summer, officials said.

Nordic neighbours Norway and Denmark have also both seen an uptick in new cases in recent weeks—but like Finland from low levels—with local clusters detected.

On Thursday, Sweden's Public Health Agency said they had seen a small uptick in new cases in the last few days.

State epidemiologist Anders Tegnell said they were not sure why they were seeing an uptick but added it was "clear that young adults that account for a large part of that increase."

Sweden, which famously avoided a lockdown, has seen a reduction in new cases over the last few weeks, although both its caseload and death toll are far above those of any of its neighbours.

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