

Spain calls on Madrid residents to restrict movements due to virus

September 22 2020



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Spain's health minister on Tuesday called on Madrid residents to limit their movements and social contacts to the "essential" to reverse a surge in COVID-19 infections, a day after new curbs took effect in some areas.

Spain is struggling to contain a second wave of the virus, which has

already infected over 670,000 people and claimed over 30,000 lives, one of Europe's highest tolls.

Madrid has become the epicentre of the contagion with a rate of infection of nearly 700 cases per 100,000 inhabitants in the last two weeks—nearly three times the national average, which in itself is the highest in the European Union.

"I would recommend residents of Madrid to limit to the maximum their movements, that they scrupulously respect the measures dictated by the health authorities in the region and minimise their movements to what is essential and their contacts to those closest to them," Health Minister Salvador Illa said during an interview with radio Cadena Ser.

His comments come a day after a partial lockdown came into effect on some 850,000 people in the Madrid region—mostly in densely populated, low-income districts in the south—who account for 13 percent of the region's population of 6.6 million but 24 percent of virus infections.

The restrictions announced Friday prevent people from entering or leaving the affected areas, except for work, education or to seek medical care but they can move around freely within their zone.

'Priority areas'

But aside from reducing the maximum size of permitted social gatherings from ten to six people across the entire region, the regional government of Madrid did not impose any other measures to rein in infections elsewhere.

On Tuesday though regional leader Isabel Diaz Ayuso said her government was considering extending the partial lockdown measures to

other areas.

"We will do everything that is necessary to contain (the virus) but we want to see how these measures work in these priority areas," she told radio Onda Cero.

"In a few weeks we will see the results but meanwhile we are studying where else to apply more restrictions."

Up until now the areas affected by the new mobility restrictions have all counted more than 1,000 COVID-19 cases per 100,000 inhabitants.

Many epidemiologists have expressed doubts about the effectiveness of Madrid's new measures but Illa said he believed they could help control the spread of the virus and that it would not be necessary to declare a state of emergency in the region, a step which would allow the government to confine people to their homes.

Since the central government ended its state of emergency on June 21, lifting all national lockdown restrictions, responsibility for public healthcare and managing the pandemic has been left in the hands of Spain's 17 autonomous regions.

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Citation: Spain calls on Madrid residents to restrict movements due to virus (2020, September 22) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-09-spain-madrid-residents-restrict-movements.html>

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