

Belgium fears virus "tsunami" as virus cases keep soaring

October 19 2020, by Samuel Petrequin



A man cycles by a chocolate shop with a message in the window in the historic center of Antwerp, Belgium, Sunday, Oct. 18, 2020. Faced with a resurgence of coronavirus cases, the Belgian government on Friday announced new restrictions to try to hold the disease in check, including a night-time curfew and the closure of cafes, bars and restaurants for a month. The measures will take effect on Monday, Oct. 19, 2020. (AP Photo/Virginia Mayo)

Bars and restaurants across Belgium shut down for a month and a night-time curfew took effect Monday as health authorities warned of a possible "tsunami" of new virus cases in the hard-hit nation that hosts the European Union's headquarters.

The new measures aim to limit social interactions to slow down the exponential growth of the pandemic in the nation of 11.5 million people. The new surge of [coronavirus](#) cases has already prompted several hospitals to delay nonessential operations to focus on treating COVID-19 cases.

"We are really very close to a tsunami," Health Minister Frank Vandenbroucke told broadcaster RTL.

According to AP figures based on data collected by Johns Hopkins University, Belgium recorded an average of 73.95 daily cases per 100,000 people over the past seven days, the second-worst record in the EU behind the Czech Republic.

Yves Van Laethem, the COVID-19 crisis center spokesman, said Monday that 7,876 daily new cases were diagnosed on average over the past seven days, up 79% compared with the previous week. Van Laethem said the epidemiological situation could be even worse, given delays in the publication of test results.

To fight the spread of the disease, Belgium's curfew will be enforced from midnight until 5 a.m., at least for a month. Alcohol sales will be banned after 8 p.m., while the number of people that residents can see socially outside their households will be reduced from three to just one all month.



People walk by chairs and tables of an empty terrace in the historical center of Antwerp, Belgium, Sunday, Oct. 18, 2020. Faced with a resurgence of coronavirus cases, the Belgian government on Friday announced new restrictions to try to hold the disease in check, including a night-time curfew and the closure of cafes, bars and restaurants for a month. The measures will take effect on Monday, Oct. 19, 2020. (AP Photo/Virginia Mayo)

People have been ordered to work from home wherever possible. Thousands of students have been affected as several universities have demanded that only one seat in five in lecture halls hosting more than 50 people can be occupied.

As of Monday, 2,485 COVID-19 patients were hospitalized in Belgium, including 412 in intensive care. Authorities have warned that intensive

care units will hit their capacity of 2,000 beds by mid-November if new cases continue to soar at the same pace.

Prime Minister Alexander De Croo said the situation in Belgium now is more serious than it was in March when the country implemented a national lockdown.

"We have three times as many people in [intensive care](#) in hospitals. So the situation in the hospitals is serious. It will continue to deteriorate," De Croo told RTL.

With the extra restrictions, many restaurant and bar owners fear they might have to pull the plug for good. The sector contains more than 57,000 businesses and employs 120,000 people in Belgium.



A for sale sign hangs in the window of a restaurant which has gone out of business in the historical center of Antwerp, Belgium, Sunday, Oct. 18, 2020. Faced with a resurgence of coronavirus cases, the Belgian government on Friday announced new restrictions to try to hold the disease in check, including a night-time curfew and the closure of cafes, bars and restaurants for a month. The measures will take effect on Monday, Oct. 19, 2020. (AP Photo/Virginia Mayo)



An elderly man is wheeled into a cafe in the historical center of Antwerp, Belgium, Sunday, Oct. 18, 2020. Faced with a resurgence of coronavirus cases, the Belgian government on Friday announced new restrictions to try to hold the disease in check, including a night-time curfew and the closure of cafes, bars and restaurants for a month. The measures will take effect on Monday, Oct. 19, 2020. (AP Photo/Virginia Mayo)



Spanish Alejandro Quintana removes the terrace of his restaurant before closing it down in Brussels, Belgium, Sunday, Oct. 18, 2020. Faced with a resurgence of coronavirus cases, the Belgian government on Friday announced new restrictions to try to hold the disease in check, including a night-time curfew and the closure of cafes, bars and restaurants for a month. The measures will take effect on Monday, Oct. 19, 2020. (AP Photo/Francisco Seco)



Staff of Spanish El Fontan restaurant tidy up before closing it down in Brussels, Sunday, Oct. 18, 2020. Faced with a resurgence of coronavirus cases, the Belgian government on Friday announced new restrictions to try to hold the disease in check, including a night-time curfew and the closure of cafes, bars and restaurants for a month. The measures will take effect on Monday, Oct. 19, 2020. (AP Photo/Francisco Seco)



Terrace chairs and tables are chained together in the historic center of Antwerp, Belgium, Sunday, Oct. 18, 2020. Faced with a resurgence of coronavirus cases, the Belgian government on Friday announced new restrictions to try to hold the disease in check, including a night-time curfew and the closure of cafes, bars and restaurants for a month. The measures will take effect on Monday, Oct. 19, 2020. (AP Photo/Virginia Mayo)

Henrique Martins, the chef at the Gout et Saveur restaurant in Brussels, says he will rely on state subsidies and takeout sales to survive.

"It's pretty catastrophic, we'll see and try to hold on," he told The Associated Press on Monday.

© 2020 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed without permission.

Citation: Belgium fears virus "tsunami" as virus cases keep soaring (2020, October 19) retrieved 25 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-10-belgium-virus-tsunami-cases-soaring.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.