

Czechs enter 2nd lockdown to avoid health system collapse

October 22 2020, by Karel Janicek



In this March 16, 2020 file photo a young man wearing a face mask walks across an empty Charles Bridge in Prague, Czech Republic. Czechs had been assured it wouldn't happen again. But amid a record surge of coronavirus infections that's threatening the entire health system with collapse, the Czech Republic is adopting on Thursday exactly the same massive restrictions it slapped on citizens in the spring. Prime Minister Andrej Babis had repeatedly said these measures would never be repeated.(AP Photo/Petr David Josek, File)

Czechs had been assured it wouldn't happen again.

But amid a record surge of [coronavirus](#) infections that's threatening the entire health system with collapse, the Czech Republic is adopting on Thursday exactly the same massive restrictions it slapped on citizens in the spring. Prime Minister Andrej Babis had repeatedly said these measures would never return.

"We have no time to wait," Babis explained Wednesday. "The surge is enormous."

Babis apologized for the huge impact the restrictions will have on [everyday life](#) but said if they were not taken "our health system would collapse between Nov 7-11."

"I apologize even for the fact that I ruled out this option in the past because I was not able to imagine it might happen," he added.

"Unfortunately, it has happened and now, above all, we have to protect the lives of our citizens."

The measures include limits on free movement and the closure of many stores, shopping malls and hotels. They will remain in place until at least Nov 3.

The Czech Republic had initially set an example with its effective and fast response when the pandemic first struck, but failed to learn from other countries' subsequent experiences and now faces the consequences.



In this April 23, 2020 file photo healthcare worker conducts test for the coronavirus in Prague, Czech Republic. Czechs had been assured it wouldn't happen again. But amid a record surge of coronavirus infections that's threatening the entire health system with collapse, the Czech Republic is adopting on Thursday exactly the same massive restrictions it slapped on citizens in the spring. Prime Minister Andrej Babis had repeatedly said these measures would never be repeated. (AP Photo/Petr David Jousek, File)

As the pandemic struck slightly later than in western Europe, Czech authorities gained some breathing space. They used it to impose sweeping restrictions on [daily life](#) in March, and—unlike most other European countries—made mask-wearing obligatory in all public areas.

In April, the country was the first, with Austria, to start to ease

restrictions and—again unlike most other European countries—almost completely abandoned them in the summer.

In June, thousands declared victory over the coronavirus at a big party on Prague's medieval Charles Bridge. Babis, considered a populist leader, was jubilant and told an international conference in August that his country was the "best in COVID," despite already growing numbers of infected people.

The atmosphere at Wednesday's news conference, as Babis announced the new measures, was more sober.



In this Tuesday, June 30, 2020 file photo, residents sit to dine on a 500 meter long table set on the medieval Charles Bridge, after restrictions were eased

following the coronavirus pandemic in Prague, Czech Republic. Czechs had been assured it wouldn't happen again. But amid a record surge of coronavirus infections that's threatening the entire health system with collapse, the Czech Republic is adopting on Thursday exactly the same massive restrictions it slapped on citizens in the spring. (AP Photo/Petr David Josek, File)



In this Oct. 1, 2020 file photo a COVID-19 patient lies on a bed in an intensive care unit (ICU) at Na Bulovce hospital in Prague, Czech Republic. Czechs had been assured it wouldn't happen again. But amid a record surge of coronavirus infections that's threatening the entire health system with collapse, the Czech Republic is adopting on Thursday exactly the same massive restrictions it slapped on citizens in the spring. Prime Minister Andrej Babis had repeatedly said these measures would never be repeated. (AP Photo/Petr David Josek, File)



In this March 27, 2020 file photo volunteers with the Red Cross sort homemade face masks meant to be sterilized and distributed among people in need in Prague, Czech Republic. Czechs had been assured it wouldn't happen again. But amid a record surge of coronavirus infections that's threatening the entire health system with collapse, the Czech Republic is adopting on Thursday exactly the same massive restrictions it slapped on citizens in the spring. (AP Photo/Petr David Jousek, File)



In this March 28, 2020 file photo a general view of the near empty Charles Bridge in Prague, Czech Republic. (AP Photo/Petr David Josek, File)



In this March 17, 2020 file photo a man wearing an old military gas mask rides the subway in Prague, Czech Republic. (AP Photo/Petr David Josek, File)



In this Oct. 4, 2020 file photo fans, standing on ladders from behind the fence, celebrate a goal as they watch a Czech first division match between Bohemians Prague and Zlin in Prague, Czech Republic. Czechs had been assured it wouldn't happen again. But amid a record surge of coronavirus infections that's threatening the entire health system with collapse, the Czech Republic is adopting on Thursday exactly the same massive restrictions it slapped on citizens in the spring. (AP Photo/Petr David Josek)



In this June 3, 2020 file photo Czech Republic's Prime Minister Andrej Babis adjusts his face mask as he waits for the arrival of his Slovak counterpart Igor Matovic in Prague, Czech Republic. (AP Photo/Petr David Josek, File)



In this March 30, 2020 file photo a view of a closed gate at the Showpark brothel in Prague, Czech Republic. (AP Photo/Petr David Josek, File)



In this Oct. 15, 2020 file photo a street vendor sells face masks in downtown Prague, Czech Republic. (AP Photo/Petr David Jousek, File)



In this Tuesday, June 30, 2020 file photo, residents sit to dine on a 500 meter long table set on the medieval Charles Bridge, after restrictions were eased following the coronavirus pandemic in Prague, Czech Republic. (AP Photo/Petr David Josek, File)



In this April 7, 2020 file photo a healthcare worker attends to a COVID-19 patient in an intensive care unit (ICU) at the General University Hospital in Prague, Czech Republic. (AP Photo/Petr David Josek, File)



In this file photo people line up for a beer at a restaurant terrace in Prague, Czech Republic, Monday, May 11, 2020. (AP Photo/Petr David Josek, File)

"What happened was somehow predicted but nobody expected its scope," Babis said.

Some experts had called much earlier for strict steps.

"(Even) yesterday (would have been) late, there's a danger at every corner," Jaroslav Flegr, a professor of evolutionary biology who predicted the surge a while ago, told Czech public television.

Many still remember when Babis' then health minister, Adam Vojtech,

and his team proposed in August a mandatory return of masks in schools. Babis dismissed that option and fired the minister weeks later when the numbers of new infections started to grow rapidly in September.

They still are.

The daily figure for new confirmed cases was a record of almost 15,000 on Wednesday. That was almost 3,000 more than the previous record, set on Tuesday.

Since the start of the pandemic, the Czech Republic has registered 208,915 confirmed infections, about one third of them in the past seven days, and 1,739 people have died—with a record 100 deaths registered Monday.

The seven-day rolling average of daily new cases has risen over the past two weeks from 32.81 new cases per 100,000 people on Oct. 7 to 92.88 new cases per 100,000 people on Wednesday.

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

Citation: Czechs enter 2nd lockdown to avoid health system collapse (2020, October 22)
retrieved 20 April 2024 from
<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-10-czechs-2nd-lockdown-health-collapse.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.