

Ireland steeled for start of second virus lockdown

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Ireland on Wednesday braced for the start of a second nationwide coronavirus lockdown, with fears the new six-week hiatus will deal a heavier blow than the last one.

"It's devastating to see us locked down again ... during our busiest line-up

for the Christmas period," antique jeweller John Farrington told AFP on Tuesday.

"There's a lot of people out there with this second shutdown (who) will really, really find it hard to come through."

Starting Thursday non-essential businesses like Farrington's store in central Dublin—glimmering with vintage trinkets—will be forced to shut up shop.

All citizens will be asked to remain at home, with a strict five kilometre (three mile) travel limit, as Ireland becomes the first EU nation to return to full lockdown.

Meanwhile bars and restaurants will be limited to takeaway service only and a ban on visits between households has also been extended.

Prime minister Micheal Martin announced the fresh measures on Monday night, but unlike the previous lockdown in March pledged to keep schools open.

"If we pull hard together over the next six weeks, we will have the opportunity to celebrate Christmas in a meaningful way," he said in a national address to the country of five million.

On Tuesday and Wednesday the Irish capital was a hive of activity as the [death toll](#) from the virus reached 1,865.

'Halloween is like our Christmas'

Shay Howlin's "Fun Place" joke and costume shop did a roaring trade on Tuesday as customers prepared to celebrate Halloween in lockdown.

Inside, two staff dwarfed by shelves of horror-movie masks frantically fielded requests for werewolf claws, ninja swords and power-ranger outfits.

"Halloween is like our Christmas," Howlin explained. "So we're closed for the ten busiest days of Halloween."

He said he is "devastated" by the new lockdown which he feels is "totally unnecessary".

"I was hoping that maybe common sense would prevail because from our point of view we feel retail's a very [safe environment](#)," he said.

Ireland's [unemployment rate](#) reached a record level of 28.2 percent during the previous lockdown.

This time around, the [coalition government](#) has increased "pandemic unemployment payment" supports and a wage subsidy scheme designed to keep employers linked to staff.

Last week the Republic unveiled a record 17.75 billion euro budget to fund emergency virus measures.

Meanwhile on Wednesday, RTE reported the Irish cabinet had green-lit stiff penalties for those breaching the new [lockdown](#).

The state broadcaster said cabinet agreed to bring forward legislation allowing on-the-spot fines of up to 500 euros (\$590) for breaching restrictions and up to 1,000 euros for hosting house parties.

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