

Romania struggles to contain virus with tougher controls

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Romania announced tighter measures against the spread of the coronavirus Tuesday, as the country's intensive care units struggled with an influx of patients.

After a recent spike in cases, staff in the intensive care units are struggling, with more than 600 patients being treated for the virus across the country.

And in the last two days, two patients in a serious condition had to be transferred by helicopter to hospitals in different cities because some ICU units were full.

"There are some empty beds now, but we could reach maximum capacity," Health Minister Nelu Tataru told reporters Tuesday, referring to the situation in Bucharest.

In recent months, officials have admitted that only about 1,500 ICU beds are properly equipped, but say that an unspecified number have been added over the last few weeks.

Officials said plainclothes units would patrol crowded public spaces to enforce rules such as mask-wearing.

In Bucharest meanwhile, theatres and indoor pubs will have to close again.

"We noticed that some people only wear a mask when they see the [law enforcement](#) (...) Our goal is not to hand out fines, but we won't tolerate situation where the law is not respected", police spokesman Georgian Dragan told reporters.

The authorities will also toughen controls in places such as open markets, in a fresh attempt to stem the spread of COVID-19.

Masks are already mandatory in enclosed [public spaces](#) and in crowded outdoor spaces.

Romania reported over 2,100 new cases on Tuesday bringing the total to 139,000 since the pandemic started.

To date, 5,121 people have died, the worst death rate in the eastern part of the European Union.

In the capital Bucharest, because the rate of infections surpassed 1.5 cases per one thousand inhabitants, cinemas, theatres and indoor pubs will close from Wednesday. Private events such as weddings and baptisms will be allowed only outdoors.

Local authorities in other counties across the country have taken similar decisions.

In a country known for its poor healthcare system, officials are afraid that hospitals soon will not be able to cope if the spread of the virus is not contained.

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