

Belgium to reopen shops from December 1

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Belgium will allow shops to reopen from December 1, Prime Minister Alexander De Croo said Friday, but the country's semi-lockdown will remain in place to bring down coronavirus infections.

"The situation in our country is improving... but it's important to keep a

lid on things," De Croo said, warning that the Christmas and New Year holidays would be "different" this year.

So far, only retailers of essential goods, such as [food](#), have been allowed to stay open.

But the move to allow other shops to resume business mirrors similar easing measures in Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

France, too, is scheduled to allow non-essential retailers to lift their shutters from Saturday.

Belgium, home to EU institutions and located in a busy intersection for European travel, had been one of the worst-hit in a second wave of the [coronavirus](#) on the continent.

Bars, restaurants and cafes will remain closed, and people will continue to be required to work from home where possible, limit social contacts. A curfew from midnight to 5:00 am (2300-0400 GMT) will also remain in place.

This year "we will celebrate Christmas with our families, in small numbers. It will be more intimate," the prime minister said.

There would also be no fireworks at New Year.

"We mustn't spoil in four days what we've achieved in four weeks," De Croo said, but suggested that a more general easing of restrictions might be possible from mid-January if infection numbers continue to come down.

The premier also advised people not to travel to other countries with higher caseloads and said that [border controls](#) would be put in place and

quarantine requirements imposed for travellers returning from virus hotspots.

Belgium has recorded nearly 570,000 infections since the start of the pandemic, but recently appears to be getting the situation under control.

An average 2,765 daily cases were registered last week, just a fifth of the number last month.

And authorities hope to bring that cases down to around 500 per day by the end of the year.

The number of hospital admissions has been halved in the past two weeks, and there are currently 4,395 people in hospital down from 7,500 at the beginning of the month.

The number of coronavirus patients in intensive care stands at 1,034, down from a peak of nearly 1,500 on November 9.

In all, more than 16,300 people have died from the virus in Belgium since the start of the pandemic, including 142 in a single day on Thursday.

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