

France to end lockdown Dec 15, shops to reopen Saturday

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France aims to lift a nationwide lockdown on December 15, President Emmanuel Macron said, with shops authorised to reopen as early as Saturday after weeks of closure.

In a TV address Tuesday, Macron said some restrictions would remain in

place to avoid a resurgence of the virus, and the threat of another lockdown.

"We have slowed the spread of the virus," Macron said, "but it is still very much present".

Only moments before the president's address, France's health agency reported 458 new [coronavirus](#) deaths over the past 24 hours, taking the total to 50,237.

But according to [health authorities](#), the second virus wave reached its peak last week, with numbers of new infections, new hospital admissions and new intensive care patients all declining, while death figures have stabilised.

"If we don't want a third lockdown, we must intensify our efforts," Macron said, by protecting the most [vulnerable groups](#) and wearing masks "including when we're with friends or with relatives who don't live under the same roof".

The current lockdown, in force since the end of October, will be replaced by a countrywide curfew from 9:00 pm to 7:00 am starting December 15, Macron said, except on December 24 and 31—Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve.

"We will be able to travel without authorisation, including between regions, and spend Christmas with our families," Macron said.

French people should, however, avoid "pointless travel", he said.

Cinemas, theatres and museums will be allowed to reopen on December 15.

But restaurants—as well as high schools—will have to wait until January 20 to reopen, and only on condition that daily new virus cases drop below 5,000, Macron said.

He gave no target date for any reopening of bars, cafes or nightclubs.

France's 350 [ski resorts](#), among the most popular in Europe, will not be allowed to reopen in time for the year-end holiday season, Macron said.

It was preferable, Macron said, to plan for a re-opening of the resorts in January "under favourable conditions".

Starting on Saturday and pending the December 15 end to the [lockdown](#), people will be allowed to move freely in a radius of 20 kilometres (12.4 miles) around their homes for up to three hours a day, compared to 1 kilometre for up to one hour now.

Religious ceremonies will also be authorised again from Saturday, but are limited to 30 people, Macron said.

Macron also said that he hoped that the first COVID vaccines would be available for use by the end of December or in early January.

Vaccines would be made available to high-risk populations first and will not be made mandatory, Macron vowed.

Government spokesman Gabriel Attal said earlier that France had already signed three vaccine contracts with pharmaceutical companies, while talks with three others were "at a very advanced stage" and other discussions ongoing. Each contract signed would cover about 30 million vaccine doses, Attal said.

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