

Many French flout lockdown as hospital cases top April records

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Over half of French people have broken regulations governing the country's second coronavirus lockdown, a survey showed Thursday, as the number of COVID-19 cases in hospitals topped April records.

The Ifop survey, which comes half-way through the new confinement

period, confirmed that the French are taking the second nationwide shutdown far less seriously than they did the first in March-April.

It showed that 60 percent had flouted the rules at least once, either by giving a false reason for going out on their self-signed permission slip or by meeting up with family and friends.

The figure was far higher than during the first lockdown when the proportion of rule-breakers stood at under 40 percent during the first six weeks.

There have been more than 42,000 COVID deaths in France, 329 on Wednesday alone when 4,789 were in intensive care.

"The second wave is extremely strong," Prime Minister Jean Castex told a virtual news conference.

"One in four deaths is now due to COVID," he said, while the pressure on hospitals has "risen strongly".

The number of people in hospital care for COVID-19 in France is now higher than previous peaks above 32,000 last seen in April, Castex said.

But Castex also said that new COVID cases had fallen by 16 percent in the first week of the current lockdown, although people should remain "cautious", he warned, adding that any relaxation of current lockdown rules would in the current context be "irresponsible".

Toll on public morale

Small shops will remain shut for at least two more weeks, despite lobbying from the sector for the right to reopen.

Castex did, however, raise the possibility that some shops might be allowed to reopen in December if current trends continue.

Bars and restaurants will remain shut.

The current lockdown phase ends on December 1, but Castex said that people would have to continue to carry self-signed permit slips when leaving their homes even beyond that date.

The prime minister said he hoped that people would be able to travel and meet family for Christmas, but he warned that large gatherings would remain banned.

The poll found that the most common transgression (24 percent of respondents) was giving a false reason for going out on the permission slips that all citizens are required to download and fill out before leaving home.

Others flouted the rules by having family around to visit or went to visit relatives (24 percent) or met up with friends (20 percent).

Nine percent of respondents said they ventured out to meet up with a current or prospective sexual partner, 3 percentage points more than during the first confinement period.

The survey also confirmed that the second lockdown, coming in the heart of winter, is taking a greater toll on public morale than the first.

Over one in four—28 percent— of those questioned said they were feeling blue, compared with one in five in March-April.

France went back into lockdown on October 30 to try to tame a second wave of infections that experts warn could be deadlier than the first.

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