

Tougher COVID rules for Wales, weeks after leaving lockdown

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Wales will introduce more stringent restrictions in an attempt to bring down rising coronavirus infection rates ahead of an easing of the rules over Christmas, the devolved government said Friday.

Wales only emerged from a two-week countrywide "firebreak" lockdown on November 9, but rising rates and concern over a post-Christmas spike meant further action was required, said First Minister Mark Drakeford.

"It does not mean a return to firebreak arrangements, but the cabinet has agreed to take further specific and targeted action," said Drakeford, whose devolved government is responsible for [health policy](#) in Wales separate to the rest of the UK.

Cinemas, bowling alleys and other indoor entertainment venues in the nation of around three million people will close from next Friday.

Unlike the "firebreak" lockdown, gyms, hairdressers and other non-essential retail outlets will still be allowed to operate.

Drakeford acknowledged it was a "worrying time" for all those working in the affected industries, adding they would receive a "major package of financial support".

He said the R rate, a measure of the number of people one infected person is likely to pass the virus onto, had fallen below 1.0 after the firebreak, but was now as high as 1.4.

This was "further evidence that coronavirus is back circulating in our communities, and that the ground we gained during the firebreak period is being eroded", he said, adding that Wales needs to "create more headroom for Christmas".

The UK's four constituent nations—England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland—agreed earlier this week to ease rules over Christmas, allowing three households to mix over a period of five days.

Almost 2,500 people testing positive for [coronavirus](#) have died in Wales, contributing to more than 57,000 deaths for the UK as a whole, the worst death toll in Europe.

UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson this week announced that England would be returning to a regional tiered system of regulations when it emerges from its own nationwide lockdown on Wednesday.

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