Checkpoints in Lithuania to fight soaring COVID-19 rate

December 24 2020

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Lithuanian police said Thursday they have set up checkpoints on roads to prevent travel between municipalities in a bid to fight the highest coronavirus infection rate in the European Union.

"We turned around nearly 2,900 cars yesterday," police spokesman Ramunas Matonis told AFP on Thursday.

The Baltic EU state's government has banned travel between December 16 and January 3, with exceptions made for people travelling for work, to care for the sick, to see a doctor or to attend a funeral.

Checkpoints have been set up during the weekends and several days around Christmas and New Year to deter people from visiting friends and relatives.

Although Lithuania succeeded in controlling the first wave of the pandemic better than other EU countries in the spring, it has not managed to stem the second wave which has seen infections soar.

It now has the highest infection rate in the European Union with 1,330 cases per 100,000 inhabitants cumulatively over 14 days, according to AFP data.

All non-essential shops were closed and meetings between households banned earlier in December.

Bars and restaurants have been closed for over a month and offer only take-out services.

Matonis said police fined 91 people for breaching lockdown restrictions in a single day on Wednesday, mostly for meeting people from other households and failure to wear a mask.

The minimum fine is 250 euros ($305).

A country with a population of 2.8 million, Lithuania has reported nearly 124,000 COVID-19 infections, including 1,186 deaths, since February.

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