

Dutch leader announces tough new nationwide virus lockdown

December 14 2020, by Mike Corder



Shoppers, some queueing outside a store, are seen in Kalverstraat in Amsterdam, Netherlands, Monday, Dec. 14, 2020. Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte is expected to impose a tough lockdown Monday night in a speech to the nation as coronavirus infection rates in the Netherlands rise sharply despite a two-month "partial lockdown." Shoppers didn't wait for the announcement and headed into cities Monday in a bid to beat the lockdown, with lines forming outside stores, museums and even pot-selling coffeeshops. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong)

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte imposed a tough new five-week nationwide lockdown Monday, saying schools, nonessential shops, museums and gyms will close down at midnight until Jan. 19.

"We have to bite through this very sour apple before things get better," a somber Rutte said in a televised address to the nation.

As Rutte spoke from his office in The Hague, protesters could be heard blowing whistles outside.

"The reality is that this is not an innocent flu as some people—like the demonstrators outside—think," Rutte said. "But a virus that can hit everybody hard."

From Tuesday, all non-essential shops will close until Jan. 19 along with businesses such as hair salons, museums and theaters. All schools and universities will have to switch to remote learning from Wednesday. Child daycare centers will be closed to all except children of key workers.

The government also urged people to receive a maximum of two guests over the age of 13 per day, but relaxed the rule slightly for Dec. 24-26, saying three people can visit on those normally festive days.

"We realize as a Cabinet how intense and drastic the measures we are taking today are," Rutte said. "Especially so close to Christmas."

As news of the looming lockdown leaked out before Rutte's speech, many people keen to take their last chance at Christmas shopping flocked into city centers.



Visitors queue to enter Stedelijk Museum, the capital's modern and contemporary art museum, in Amsterdam, Netherlands, Monday, Dec. 14, 2020. Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte is expected to impose a tough lockdown Monday night in a speech to the nation as coronavirus infection rates in the Netherlands rise sharply despite a two-month "partial lockdown." Dutch media citing unnamed government sources said Rutte will likely order schools to close from Wednesday, and shut non-essential shops and businesses such as hair salons, museums and theaters from Tuesday until Jan. 19, 2021. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong)

Lines formed Monday afternoon at shops, museums and even pot-selling coffee shops as people tried to beat the lockdown.

"It's ridiculous at the moment," said Bart van der Wal at the Tweede Kamer coffeeshop in a narrow alley near Amsterdam's famous canals, where clients were lined up around the corner. "Everybody thinks the coffeeshops will be closed tomorrow."

Van der Wal said he hoped coffeeshops would be allowed to stay open for takeout "because otherwise people will deal on the street."

Bars and restaurants have been closed since mid-October, although many restaurants, cafes and coffeeshops have offered takeout sales. The partial lockdown initially slowed high infection rates, but they have been rising again in recent days.

The 7-day rolling average of daily new cases in Netherlands has risen over the past two weeks from 29.22 new cases per 100,000 people on Nov. 29 to 47.47 per 100,000 people on Dec. 13.



People queue to buy marijuana and hashish at coffeeshop De Tweede Kamer, whose name is a reference to the Lower House of the Dutch parliament, in Amsterdam, Netherlands, Monday, Dec. 14, 2020. Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte is expected to impose a tough lockdown Monday night in a speech to the nation as coronavirus infection rates in the Netherlands rise sharply despite a two-month "partial lockdown." Dutch media citing unnamed government sources said Rutte will likely order schools to close from Wednesday, and shut non-essential shops and businesses such as hair salons, museums and theaters from Tuesday until Jan. 19, 2021. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong)

"It's serious. It's very serious," Health Minister Hugo de Jonge said Monday ahead of a Cabinet meeting to discuss action to rein in the spread of the virus. "We see the infection numbers rising sharply in recent days, we see that hospital admissions are increasing again, the

pressure on the health care sector remains high."

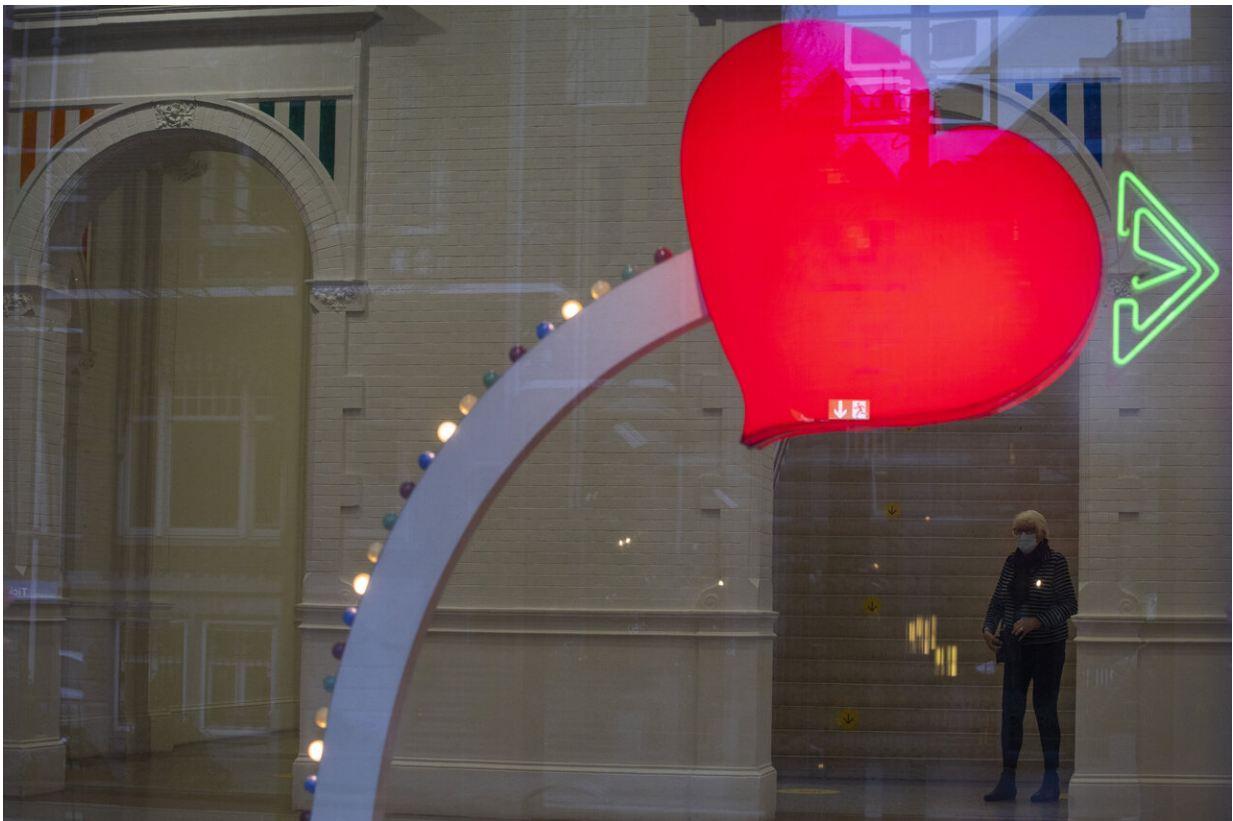
Rutte's speech Monday evening came a day after neighboring Germany announced similar coronavirus restrictions in an attempt to reduce its stubbornly high infection rates. Those measures also go well into January.

And earlier Monday, British Health Secretary Matt Hancock announced that London and surrounding areas will be placed under the highest level of coronavirus restrictions from Wednesday in a bid to slow sharply rising infection rates.

Under Tier 3 restrictions, the toughest level in England's three-tier system, people can't socialize indoors and bars, pubs and restaurants must close except for takeout.



People queue on a bridge to buy pot at a nearby coffeeshop after being directed by a security guard, left in orange vest, in Amsterdam, Netherlands, Monday, Dec. 14, 2020. Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte is expected to impose a tough lockdown Monday night in a speech to the nation as coronavirus infection rates in the Netherlands rise sharply despite a two-month "partial lockdown." Dutch media citing unnamed government sources said Rutte will likely order schools to close from Wednesday, and shut non-essential shops and businesses such as hair salons, museums and theaters from Tuesday until Jan. 19, 2021. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong)



A visitor with a mandatory face mask is seen at Stedelijk Museum, the capital's modern and contemporary art museum, in Amsterdam, Netherlands, Monday, Dec. 14, 2020. Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte is expected to impose a tough lockdown Monday night in a speech to the nation as coronavirus infection rates

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A man gets direction from an employee, left, of the Art Deco movie theater Pathe Tuschinski in Amsterdam, Netherlands, Monday, Dec. 14, 2020. Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte is expected to impose a tough lockdown Monday night in a speech to the nation as coronavirus infection rates in the Netherlands rise sharply despite a two-month "partial lockdown." Dutch media citing unnamed government sources said Rutte will likely order schools to close from Wednesday, and shut non-essential shops and businesses such as hair salons, museums and theaters from Tuesday until Jan. 19, 2021. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong)



Empty tables wait for customers at 't Blauwe Theehuis, or Blue Tea-House, in Amsterdam's Vondelpark, Monday, Dec. 14, 2020. Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte is expected to impose a tough lockdown Monday night in a speech to the nation as coronavirus infection rates in the Netherlands rise sharply despite a two-month "partial lockdown." Dutch media citing unnamed government sources said Rutte will likely order schools to close from Wednesday, and shut non-essential shops and businesses such as hair salons, museums and theaters from Tuesday until Jan. 19, 2021. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong)



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Shoppers walk down Kalverstraat in Amsterdam, Netherlands, Monday, Dec. 14, 2020. Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte is expected to impose a tough lockdown Monday night in a speech to the nation as coronavirus infection rates in the Netherlands rise sharply despite a two-month "partial lockdown." Shoppers didn't wait for the announcement and headed into cities Monday in a bid to beat the lockdown, with lines forming outside stores, museums and even pot-selling coffeeshops. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong)

Around 10,000 people in the Netherlands are confirmed to have died of COVID-19 since the start of the outbreak.

Rutte said that with vaccinations starting in the new year, 2021 would be a year "of hope, of light at the end of the tunnel."

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