

# Nonessential shops reopen in Belgium as virus numbers drop

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People, wearing face masks to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, walk past a display windows of a shopping mall in a commercial street in downtown Brussels, Tuesday, Dec. 1, 2020. Non-essential shops in Belgium are reopening on Tuesday in the wake of encouraging figures about declining infection rates and hospital admissions because of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Francisco Seco)

Nonessential shops in Belgium reopened Tuesday in the wake of encouraging figures about declining daily coronavirus infection rates and hospital admissions. Few overcrowding incidents were reported.

The government had been fearful that the change might lead to massive gatherings in the nation's most popular shopping centers and streets. Over the weekend, pre-Christmas light festivals already led to crowded scenes in several cities, prompting warnings from virologists about the dangers of reopening too soon.

But even if lines were long outside some multinational chains, there were few people in smaller shops and in provincial towns. Still, for many it was a joyous day.

"I'm so happy! So happy to reopen, to see my little customers and my little shop again," said Sarah de Kinkajou, owner of the Kinkajou toy shop in Brussels.

Belgium, host to the headquarters of the 27-nation European Union, has been one of the hardest-hit countries in Europe during the pandemic. Belgium has reported more than 16,500 deaths linked to the virus during two surges in the spring and the fall.

Experts say wearing masks and practicing social distancing will be essential in containing the spreading of the virus when shopping returns to a sense of normalcy. Despite the intense infections and deaths the country has seen, people still gather in large numbers and many do not wear masks.

Under the new rules, shopping has to be done alone or with a minor or a dependent person. Time in a shop is limited to half an hour. Restaurants and bars remain closed.



People, wearing face masks to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, walk past a shopping mall display windows with Christmas decoration in a commercial street in downtown Brussels, Tuesday, Dec. 1, 2020. Non-essential shops in Belgium are reopening on Tuesday in the wake of encouraging figures about declining infection rates and hospital admissions because of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Francisco Seco)





People, wearing face masks to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, wait in line to enter a shop in a commercial street in downtown Brussels, Tuesday, Dec. 1, 2020. Non-essential shops in Belgium are reopening on Tuesday in the wake of encouraging figures about declining infection rates and hospital admissions because of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Francisco Seco)



A woman, wearing a face mask to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, walks past a board promoting Christmas shopping in a commercial street in downtown Brussels, Tuesday, Dec. 1, 2020. Non-essential shops in Belgium are reopening on Tuesday in the wake of encouraging figures about declining infection rates and hospital admissions because of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Francisco Seco)





Belgium police officers and security personnel, wearing face mask to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, block temporary an entrance of a commercial street to avoid crowds in downtown Brussels, Tuesday, Dec. 1, 2020. Non-essential shops in Belgium are reopening on Tuesday in the wake of encouraging figures about declining infection rates and hospital admissions because of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Francisco Seco)



Sarah De Kinkajou, owner of Kinkajou toy shop, organises items before opening her business in Brussels, Tuesday, Dec. 1, 2020. Non-essential shops in Belgium are reopening on Tuesday in the wake of encouraging figures about declining infection rates and hospital admissions because of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Francisco Seco)





Owner of Kinkajou toy shop Sarah De Kinkajou, left, wearing a mask to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, talks to a customer after opening her business in Brussels, Tuesday, Dec. 1, 2020. Non-essential shops in Belgium are reopening on Tuesday in the wake of encouraging figures about declining infection rates and hospital admissions because of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Francisco Seco)





Sarah De Kinkajou, owner of Kinkajou toy shop, checks orders before opening her business in Brussels, Tuesday, Dec. 1, 2020. Non-essential shops in Belgium are reopening on Tuesday in the wake of encouraging figures about declining infection rates and hospital admissions because of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Francisco Seco)

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