

As virus cases dip, western Switzerland reopens restaurants

December 10 2020, by Nadine Achoui-Lesage



A waitress wearing a face protection mask serves food at the restaurant La Bavaria during the reopening lunch after 5 weeks of closure in Lausanne, Switzerland, Thursday, Dec. 10, 2020. While much of Switzerland is preparing for tighter lockdown restrictions because of COVID-19, the country's French-speaking regions are going in the other direction, allowing restaurants to reopen. (Laurent Gillieron/Keystone via AP)

While much of Switzerland is preparing for tighter lockdown restrictions because of COVID-19, the country's French-speaking regions are going in the other direction—allowing restaurants to reopen on Thursday after a drop in cases from one of the world's highest rates of infection roughly a month ago.

Authorities in five cantons, or regions, around the cities of Geneva and Lausanne are allowing restaurants to reopen, under strict conditions. But federal officials have said new nationwide restrictions could be ordered on Friday and start this weekend—leaving restaurateurs and their eateries in limbo and unsure about which rules to follow in coming days.

"We understand the canton says opening will take place on the 10th, but we're also being told that on the 11th there may be new restrictive measures starting on the 12th ... all this is creating confusion," said Mauro Poggia, a member of Geneva's regional council in charge of safety, health and employment."

In an interview in his office, Poggia said the easing of lockdown measures was a "relief" but acknowledged: "We know the third wave is ahead of us."

Joao Tavares, owner of the Carnivore restaurant in Geneva's old town, lamented: "We can open, we can't... We've been told we maybe can open two days, but maybe not."

"Today, we are here for the clients and really happy to be there for them. Everything is ready, but we don't know if tomorrow we will have to shut down."



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In late October and early November, the Geneva region of about 500,000 people that houses the headquarters of the World Health Organization recorded over 1,000 new cases per day on seven separate days.

On Nov. 1, with the main university hospital complex getting flooded with new COVID-19 cases, Geneva ordered restaurants shut.

Now, the region has generally been recording 100 to 200 cases over the past two weeks, hitting as low as 51 on Dec. 6—the lowest one-day tally in two months.

The big improvement has not been seen elsewhere in Switzerland, where cases numbers remain high and, in some cases, are still rising.

The federal government, in an attempt to unify the anti-virus rules in its 26 cantons, this week proposed a countrywide set of regulations that would include closing shops, restaurants, gyms and other businesses open to the public at 7 p.m. each day and all day on Sundays.

Swiss authorities have sought to strike a balance between more stringent anti-COVID measures in neighboring countries like France, Germany and Italy—hoping to limit economic fallout and rely on individual responsibility through physical distancing, hand hygiene and other prevention measures.

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