

Colombia brings back lockdowns as coronavirus cases rise

January 5 2021, by Manuel Rueda



A healthcare worker collects a nasal swab sample to test for COVID-19, in Bogota, Colombia, Tuesday, Jan. 5, 2021. Colombia's capital city is reimposing lockdown measures on Tuesday as new coronavirus infections rise around the country. (AP Photo/Ivan Valencia)

As the holiday season winds down, Colombia is experiencing a sharp rise

in coronavirus infections that has prompted several cities to impose curfews and stay at home measures that had not been implemented for months.

In the capital [city](#) of Bogota, the local government locked down three districts that have a population of about 2.5 million people, ordering all businesses except for supermarkets and pharmacies in that part of the city to close.

In Medellin, Colombia's second-largest city, authorities announced a curfew that will last from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. every day until next week. Night-time curfews have also been adopted in the city of Cali and in some towns along Colombia's Caribbean coast where thousands of tourists are still spending their holidays.

Officials said the measures are being taken to control a growing number of infections and stabilize [hospitalization rates](#).

Colombia was reporting around 8,000 new coronavirus infections per day at the end of November, but transmission appears to have risen in December as people traveled for the holidays, met with their families, and in some cases, held mass gatherings and dance parties, despite a government ban on such activities.

Over the past week, the South American country has been reporting more than 11,000 infections per day, while in some cities ICU wards for coronavirus patients have reached 90% occupancy rates.



People wait to be tested for COVID-19 as a healthcare worker interviews a patient, in Bogota, Colombia, Tuesday, Jan. 5, 2021. Colombia's capital city is reimposing lockdown measures on Tuesday as new coronavirus infections rise around the country. (AP Photo/Ivan Valencia)

In Bogota, 23 hospitals—out of 60—reported on Monday that their ICU wards were fully occupied. On Tuesday, officials said that they were locking down part of the city to prevent hospitals from overflowing.

"In the following days we will have 1.3 million people returning" from vacation, Luis Ernesto Gomez, the city's acting mayor, said on Tuesday. Mayor Claudia Lopez is currently on vacation. "That will put pressure on our hospitals and increase interactions and contagion," Gomez said.

The districts which have been placed on lockdown for two weeks include wealthy Usaquen, which is expected by officials to receive large numbers of people coming back from holidays. Officials in Bogota urged incoming travelers to self isolate for a week and work from home.

But many residents expressed their frustration with the return of lockdowns.



An employee wearing a protective face mask amid the new coronavirus pandemic, sweeps the patio of a closed restaurant in Bogota, Colombia, Tuesday, Jan. 5, 2021. Colombia's capital city is reimposing lockdown measures on Tuesday as COVID-19 infections rise around the country. (AP Photo/Ivan Valencia)



A healthcare worker collects a nasal swab sample to test for COVID-19, in Bogota, Colombia, Tuesday, Jan. 5, 2021. Colombia's capital city is reimposing lockdown measures on Tuesday as new coronavirus infections rise around the country. (AP Photo/Ivan Valencia)



A cyclist wearing a protective face mask amid the new coronavirus pandemic, pushes his bike along a pedestrian path in Bogota, Colombia, Tuesday, Jan. 5, 2021. Colombia's capital city is reimposing lockdown measures on Tuesday as COVID-19 infections rise around the country. (AP Photo/Ivan Valencia)



A person sits in an empty plaza amid the new coronavirus pandemic, in Bogotá, Colombia, Tuesday, Jan. 5, 2021. Colombia's capital city is reimposing lockdown measures on Tuesday as COVID-19 infections rise around the country. (AP Photo/Ivan Valencia)

"I don't agree with this," said Johanna Parra, a housewife from Suba, one of the locked down districts. "Many other area areas of the city are still open, so people will continue to go out and interact."

Colombia has reported more than 1.6 million cases of coronavirus since the pandemic broke out, which makes it the second country with the most infections in Latin America after Brazil. The death rate from the virus in Colombia however, is lower than in Mexico, Argentina or Peru.

Vaccination has not begun in Colombia yet and is only set to start in February.

In a bid to limit social gatherings and control the spread of the virus, some municipal governments are also banning alcohol sales this weekend.

"To fight this second wave of the virus we all have to pitch in" Gomez said. "We want to start February with vaccination campaigns and with the economy running at full steam."

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