

Cyprus eases second virus lockdown

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Cyprus announced Wednesday a cautious easing from February 1 of its national lockdown following a decline in the spread of COVID-19 infections that peaked after Christmas.

The Mediterranean island went into lockdown on January 10 for the second time since last March after daily cases hit a record 907 on

December 29.

Health Minister Constantinos Ioannou said the government has been relying on testing, restrictions and vaccinations to keep the pandemic in check.

"We are in the third week of lockdown and an improvement of the epidemiological picture allows us to begin the gradual de-escalation of restrictive measures," he told reporters.

"De-escalation will be very slow, coordinated and controlled," he added.

Between February 1 and 8, retail shops, malls, [primary schools](#) and hairdressers will open, while up to 50 percent of employees will be able to return to their workplace provided they are regularly tested.

Ioannou said the government will make free antigen rapid tests available.

But a night-time 9 pm to 5 am curfew to tame the pandemic remains in place as does a ban on restaurants and bars apart from deliveries and takeout.

And Cypriots who leave home for exercise, shopping or an emergency still need to receive official approval by text messages, with outings restricted to twice a day.

A ban on household visits is being eased next month.

But all social and public gatherings remain banned, as are grassroots sporting activities and gyms.

New COVID-19 cases have subsided to under 200 daily while hospital admissions have eased.

Coronavirus infections in December broke new ground, registering 12,000 more than the previous nine months combined.

January is already one of the deadliest months on record with 65 of the 190 [coronavirus](#) deaths recorded nationwide since the outbreak.

The health ministry registered 109 new virus cases on Tuesday, taking the total number of recorded infections to 30,252.

Cyprus had largely kept a lid on the pandemic by introducing an early lockdown in March that was gradually eased from early May.

Face masks are mandatory indoors and outdoors, except at home.

Cyprus has begun rolling out a vaccination programme against COVID-19 with over 17,000 people already inoculated.

The second wave of coronavirus has hit Cyprus hard especially with the new variant found in the UK also reaching the holiday island.

"Despite the delay in the supply of vaccines, we are optimistic that we will cover lost ground because we have ordered many more vaccines than the population of Cyprus," the minister said.

Cyprus has ordered around 3.5 million vaccine doses, some three times more than its population, through the European Union.

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