

# Gibraltar reels as Covid deaths quadruple in fortnight

January 18 2021

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Gibraltar was reeling on Monday after 13 people died from COVID-19 at the weekend, with soaring infections driving its death toll up fourfold in under a fortnight.

The tiny British enclave of 34,000 residents at the southern tip of Spain said on Sunday that nine people had died over a 24-hour period in its highest daily figure yet. Four others died on Saturday.

The deaths of another two people were reported on Monday, raising the total toll to 45, Chief Minister Fabian Picardo told a news conference.

"This is now the worst loss of life of Gibraltarians in over 100 years. Even in war, we have never lost so many in such a short time," Picardo said.

Gibraltar only registered its first death from COVID-19 in mid-November and by January 6 the toll had risen to 10.

Almost all of those who died over the weekend were in their 80s and 90s.

The deaths came two weeks after Gibraltar imposed its second lockdown to slow the soaring rate of infections, with residents only able to leave home for essential shopping, to work, exercise or for medical reasons.

Initially slated for two weeks, the lockdown was extended on Friday and is likely to remain in place until the end of the month.

The territory now has more than 3,712 cases, representing a tenth of its population, after the number of infections tripled from over 1,000 at the start of December.

Officials are concerned the soaring infections may be linked to the new coronavirus variant which was first detected in the UK in November.

So far, Gibraltar has only confirmed one such case, with the territory reliant on British laboratories for genetic sequencing to confirm the

variant.

Writing on Twitter on Sunday, Spanish Foreign Minister Arancha Gonzalez Laya sent a message of "solidarity with all Gibraltarians who are fighting #COVID19," saying she hoped it would "soon be behind us".

Despite its proximity to hard-hit Spain, which has counted 2.2 million cases and more than 53,000 deaths, Gibraltar has not closed its border which is crossed daily by 15,000 workers, although movement is restricted to essential work or medical reasons.

Gibraltar began rolling out its vaccination programme on January 9 using the Pfizer vaccine and by Sunday night had administered 5,847 doses—covering around 17 percent of the population.

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Citation: Gibraltar reels as Covid deaths quadruple in fortnight (2021, January 18) retrieved 27 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-01-gibraltar-reels-covid-deaths-quadruple.html>

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