

Portugal tightens lockdown as pandemic surge breaks records

January 18 2021, by Barry Hatton



Ambulances bringing patients are parked outside the COVID-19 emergency ward at the Santa Maria hospital in Lisbon, Monday, Jan. 18, 2021. Stricter lockdown rules are being enacted in Portugal, the country's government announced Monday, as a surging COVID-19 pandemic sets grim records and pushes hospitals to the limit of their capacity. (AP Photo/Armando Franca)

Stricter lockdown rules are being enacted in Portugal, the government announced Monday, as a surging COVID-19 pandemic sets grim records and pushes hospitals to the limit of their capacity.

Prime Minister António Costa said too many people had taken advantage of exceptions included in the lockdown that began last Friday, with authorities reporting 70% of normal movement over the weekend.

"We are going through the most serious phase of the [pandemic](#)" so far, Costa said, urging people to comply with the rules. "This is no time for finding loopholes in the law."

He announced that January sales at stores are banned, as are gatherings of any number of people in public areas. More police will be deployed outside schools, which remain open, to prevent students forming groups.

Traveling between districts is to be prohibited at weekends, while stores and supermarkets will have shorter opening times.

The pandemic has gained momentum since Christmas, when restrictions on gatherings and movement were eased for four days. Costa said experts predict cases will continue to rise through Jan. 24.

Portugal's 14-day case notification rate per 100,000 people has almost doubled in less than two weeks, reaching 901—the fifth highest of the 31 countries monitored by the European Centre for Disease Control, a European Union agency.



A tram is parked idle in Lisbon, Monday, Jan. 18, 2021. Stricter lockdown rules are being enacted in Portugal, the country's government announced Monday, as a surging COVID-19 pandemic sets grim records and pushes hospitals to the limit of their capacity. (AP Photo/Armando Franca)



Workers set up new modules to expand the capacity of the COVID-19 emergency ward at the Santa Maria hospital in Lisbon, Monday, Jan. 18, 2021. Stricter lockdown rules are being enacted in Portugal, the country's government announced Monday, as a surging COVID-19 pandemic sets grim records and pushes hospitals to the limit of their capacity. (AP Photo/Armando Franca)



Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, center, who is seeking a second term in the country's presidential election on Jan. 24, participates in a presidential election debate on national radio, Monday, Jan. 18, 2021. The other candidates in the picture are Marisa Matias, left, and Tiago Mayan, right. (Pedro Pina/Pool via AP)



A healthcare worker in a protective suit walks among ambulances parked outside the COVID-19 emergency ward at the Santa Maria hospital in Lisbon, Monday, Jan. 18, 2021. Stricter lockdown rules are being enacted in Portugal, the country's government announced Monday, as a surging COVID-19 pandemic sets grim records and pushes hospitals to the limit of their capacity. (AP Photo/Armando Franca)



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Candidates Marisa Matias, President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, Tiago Mayan, Vitorino Silva, Joao Ferreira and Ana Gomes, clockwise from left, participate in a presidential election debate on national radio, Monday, Jan. 18, 2021. Rebelo de Sousa is seeking a second term in the country's presidential election on Jan. 24. (Pedro Pina/Pool via AP)



A sign shows the way to the COVID-19 emergency ward at the Santa Maria hospital in Lisbon, Monday, Jan. 18, 2021. Stricter lockdown rules are being enacted in Portugal, the country's government announced Monday, as a surging COVID-19 pandemic sets grim records and pushes hospitals to the limit of their capacity. (AP Photo/Armando Franca)

Health authorities reported Monday 167 new deaths and 276 hospitalizations the previous day—both daily records. The number of deaths in Portugal during the pandemic surpassed 9,000, almost one fourth of them since Jan. 1.

That has placed the public health system under severe strain, with some hospitals running out of beds and having to send patients to other hospitals.

More than 5,000 COVID-19 patients are in [hospital](#) wards, almost double the number at the end of last year and a new maximum. Also, 664 patients are in [intensive care](#), up from 483 in just over two weeks.

Portugal is holding a presidential election next Sunday. Candidates are campaigning under restrictions on gatherings.

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