

Belgian projections warn not to relax measures too quickly

February 22 2021



In this Tuesday, Nov. 3, 2020 file photo, tables and chairs are stacked inside of a bistro during a lockdown due to the coronavirus in the historic city center of Antwerp, Belgium. The government on Monday, Feb. 22, 2021 presented scientific projections of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in Belgium, indicating it would be very risky to extensively loosen the current restrictions over the coming weeks. (AP Photo/Virginia Mayo, File)

Belgium's government on Monday presented scientific projections of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country, indicating it would be very risky to extensively loosen the current restrictions over the coming weeks.

Based on a model that would relax measures as of next week, Belgium could be faced with its biggest spike yet in [coronavirus](#) cases, while a similar relaxation on April 1 indicated a far more muted increase. The projections were based on the spread of the more contagious variant first identified in the U.K.

The [government](#) will make a decision on Friday whether to extend the restrictions that include a curfew across the nation and continued closure of bars and restaurants while mass events, either indoors or in the open, also continue to be banned.

After Belgium, a nation of 11.5 million, was one of the hardest hit in the first wave of the pandemic and again saw a huge increase in November, the government has been able to keep cases on a manageable level since, even if it was too high to allow of a major relaxation of restrictions.

The point to give citizens more freedom again, however, is approaching, Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo said.

"An important message from the projections is that we approach a point where the risk of a third spike seriously decreases," De Croo said.



In this Saturday, Nov. 7, 2020 file photo, a restaurant staff member carries dinner boxes as she prepares part of nearly 600 take-away orders at Sergio Herman's Le Pristine restaurant in Antwerp, Belgium. The government on Monday, Feb. 22, 2021 presented scientific projections of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in Belgium, indicating it would be very risky to extensively loosen the current restrictions over the coming weeks. (AP Photo/Virginia Mayo, File)



Belgium's Prime Minister Alexander De Croo speaks during a media conference at the prime minister's office in Brussels, Monday, Feb. 22, 2021. The government on Monday presented scientific projections of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in Belgium, indicating it would be very risky to extensively loosen the current restrictions over the coming weeks. (Philip Reynaers, Pool via AP)



In this Friday, Feb. 19, 2021 file photo, A logistics officer, right, and a vaccinator, left, prepare to administer an injection of the AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine to a woman at the Vaccine Village in Antwerp, Belgium. The government on Monday, Feb. 22, 2021 presented scientific projections of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in Belgium, indicating it would be very

risky to extensively loosen the current restrictions over the coming weeks. (AP Photo/Virginia Mayo, File)



In this Tuesday, Feb. 16, 2021 file photo, a client, wearing a face mask to prevent against the spread of coronavirus, gets his hair styled at a hairdresser's shop in Brussels. The government on Monday, Feb. 22, 2021 presented scientific projections of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in Belgium, indicating it would be very risky to extensively loosen the current restrictions over the coming weeks. (AP Photo/Francisco Seco, File)



In this Tuesday, Nov. 3, 2020 file photo, a man sits alone on a park bench in the historical center of Antwerp, Belgium. The government on Monday, Feb. 22, 2021 presented scientific projections of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in Belgium, indicating it would be very risky to extensively loosen the current restrictions over the coming weeks. (AP Photo/Virginia Mayo, File)



Belgium's Prime Minister Alexander De Croo, center, attends a media conference with Belgium's virologist Steven Van Gucht and Dr. Yves Van Laethem at the prime minister's office in Brussels, Monday, Feb. 22, 2021. The government on Monday presented scientific projections of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in Belgium, indicating it would be very risky to extensively loosen the current restrictions over the coming weeks. (Philip Reynaers, Pool via AP)



Dr. Yves Van Laethem speaks during a media conference at the prime minister's office in Brussels, Monday, Feb. 22, 2021. The government on Monday presented scientific projections of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in Belgium, indicating it would be very risky to extensively loosen the current restrictions over the coming weeks. (Philip Reynaers, Pool via AP)



Belgium's Prime Minister Alexander De Croo, left, speaks during a media conference at the prime minister's office in Brussels, Monday, Feb. 22, 2021. The government on Monday presented scientific projections of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in Belgium, indicating it would be very risky to extensively loosen the current restrictions over the coming weeks. (Philip Reynaers, Pool via AP)



Belgium's virologist Steven Van Gucht speaks during a media conference at the prime minister's office in Brussels, Monday, Feb. 22, 2021. The government on Monday presented scientific projections of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in Belgium, indicating it would be very risky to extensively loosen the current restrictions over the coming weeks. (Philip Reynaers, Pool via AP)

"That point is not for tomorrow or next week, but it is not that very far away," he said.

More than 21,750 people have died from COVID-19 in densely populated Belgium, making it one of the countries hardest hit by the [pandemic](#).

With economic losses mounting, pressure on the government has increased over the past several days to allow for a widespread relaxation of rules to give companies a better chance to get through the year.

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