

Czechs tighten restrictions amid surge of new virus variant

February 19 2021, by Karel Janicek



In this Friday, Feb. 12, 2021, file photo, medical workers move a covid-19 patient into an ambulance at a hospital overrun by the covid pandemic in Cheb, Czech Republic. The Czech government has decided to further tighten restrictive measures amid a surge of a highly contagious coronavirus variant in one of the hardest-hit European Union's nations. At the same time, the worsening situation has forced the Cabinet to abandon for now its plans to reopen all stores as soon as next week. (AP Photo/Petr David Josek/File)

The Czech government moved Friday to further tighten restrictive measures amid a surge of a highly contagious coronavirus variant in one of the hardest-hit European Union's nations.

The worsening situation has forced the Cabinet to abandon its plans to reopen all stores as early as next week, while there are wider signs from central Europe of a new infection surge.

"I can't image we would change our view," Health Minister Jan Blatny said.

Blatny said residents will now also have to wear better masks in places where large numbers of people gather, including stores, hospitals and on public transportation. He said that cloth masks used so far by many will no longer be good enough and that medical grade masks, safety respirators or two surgical [masks](#) will instead be required.

"We've agreed that it's necessary to do all we can to prevent the infection from spreading," Blatny said.

Meanwhile, in Poland, the Health Ministry spokesman, Wojciech Andrusiewicz, said said the country was seeing "the beginning of the third wave" as hospitalizations are on the rise. A discussion was also underway there about whether to change mask requirements.

The Czech Republic has been facing a surge of a fast-spreading coronavirus variant first found in Britain that scientists now say is more deadly than the original virus. The Czech Republic's three hardest-hit counties, on the border with Germany and Poland, are under a complete lockdown. The number of new cases per 100,000 inhabitants in last the seven days there is around 1,000.



In this Friday, Feb. 12, 2021, file photo, Policemen stop a car to check documents of a driver near the city of Sokolov, Czech Republic. The Czech government has decided to further tighten restrictive measures amid a surge of a highly contagious coronavirus variant in one of the hardest-hit European Union's nations. At the same time, the worsening situation has forced the Cabinet to abandon for now its plans to reopen all stores as soon as next week. (AP Photo/Petr David Josek/File)

Further measures, including a complete lockdown of more hard-hit counties, will be discussed by the health authorities over the weekend. The government is also planning to make [coronavirus](#) tests mandatory for all employees not working from their homes.

According to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control,

the Czech rate of 968 new confirmed cases per 100,000 people in the past two weeks is the worst in the 27-member EU.

The seven-day rolling average of daily new cases has risen over the past two weeks from 64.95 new cases per 100,000 people on Feb. 4 to 77.77 new cases per 100,000 people on Thursday, the worst in the world, Johns Hopkins University figures showed.

The government wants to go ahead with a plan to partially reopen schools, with the students of the final grade at high schools coming back on March 1 as the first group. All students will have to get tested regularly at schools, with the government providing supplies of all the necessary tests, while teachers will be preferentially vaccinated.



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The day-to-day increase of new confirmed cases in the nation of 10.7 million hit 11,553 Thursday. It was the third straight day over 10,000 new daily cases, and 2,500 more than a week ago.

Some hospitals have been in a critical situation and have to transport COVID-19 patients to other clinics across the country. The number of patients needing intensive care was at a record high of over 1,200 this week. Only 14% of all ICU beds remain still available.

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