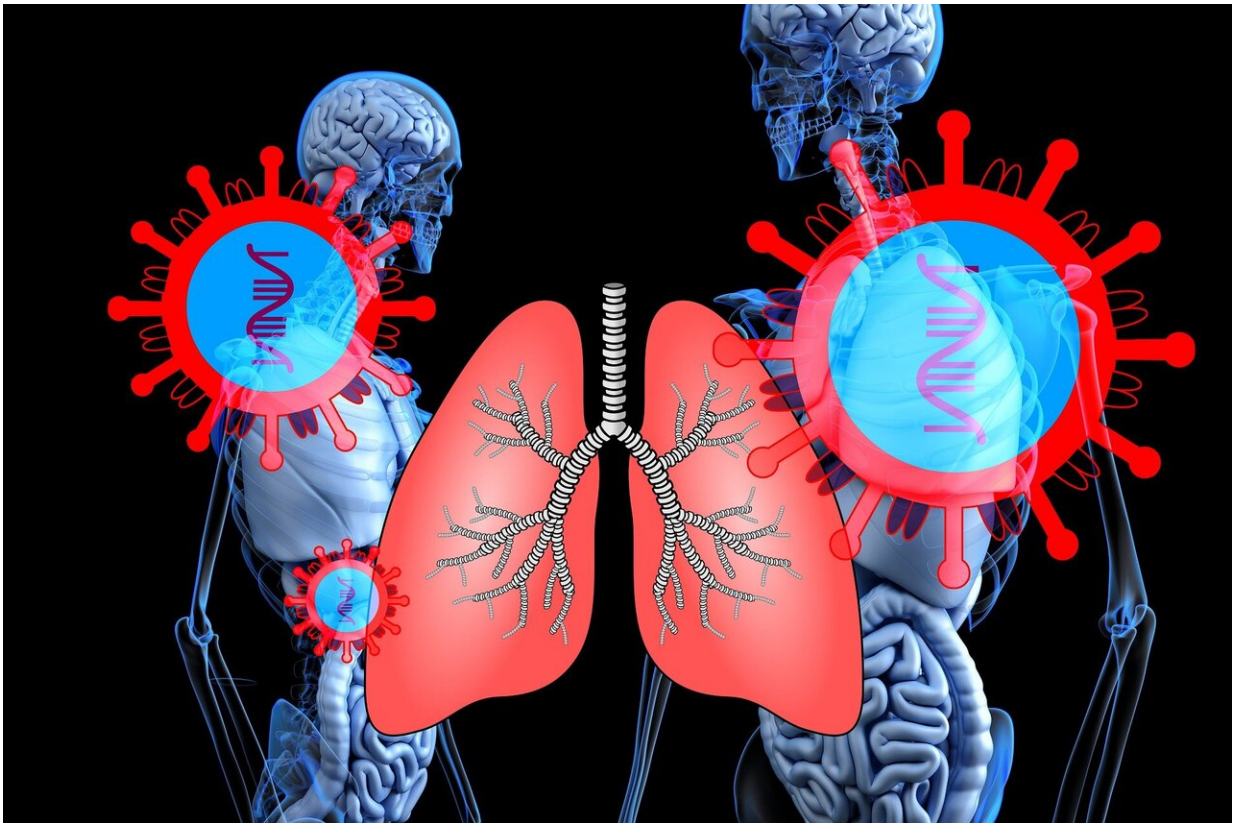


Dutch extend coronavirus curfew until mid-March

February 23 2021



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The Netherlands will extend its coronavirus curfew by two weeks despite the violent protests against the measure, and may keep even longer if need be, the prime minister said Tuesday.

The 9-4 overnight curfew has been in force since January 23 and had been scheduled to be lifted on March 2. But Prime Minister Mark Rutte said Tuesday it would now remain in place at least until the morning of March 15.

The [government](#) will decide next week whether to extend the curfew beyond March 15, the first day of legislative elections, Rutte told reporters.

"At the moment, we're still in an incredibly difficult phase," said Rutte. Experts viewed a third wave of COVID-19 infections as "inevitable".

"The figures are rising again. This is a reality we have to face," he added, highlighting concerns over the highly contagious variant of the virus first identified in the United Kingdom.

The government nevertheless said that some other restrictions would be eased, with hairdressing salons and massage parlour set to reopen.

The government also announced the partial reopening of secondary schools from March 1. Primary schools were already allowed to welcome pupils back at the beginning of February.

Bars, cafes and restaurants will remain closed, while non-essential retail outlets will be opened on March 3 for those with appointments—and with a maximum of two customers per floor.

Clashes over the curfew

Rutte is currently acting as caretaker PM until elections next month, after his government resigned in January over a scandal involving childcare payments.

In the run-up to the vote, his administration's handling of the pandemic is coming under particularly close scrutiny.

The imposition of a night-time curfew at the end of January, the first since the Second World War, sparked three days of some of the worst protests the country has seen in decades. Police arrested more than 400 people during the unrest.

The curfew also became the subject of a fierce legal battle.

Last week a lower court ordered the government to immediately lift it, arguing that such measures could only be used in sudden national emergencies such as a dyke breach.

But that [court order](#) was suspended pending an appeal and that court's ruling is now expected at the end of this week.

The parliamentary elections will be held over three days, from March 15-17, in an attempt to limit the spread of the virus, with the polling stations remaining open until 9:00 pm.

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