

No French Covid lockdown for now: PM

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The French government said Thursday that it would hold off from imposing a new COVID lockdown, as new infection numbers have stabilised and a vaccination rollout is accelerating.

Prime Minister Jean Castex told a news conference that France's death rate throughout the second wave of infections was one of the lowest in Europe thanks to a decision to tighten restrictions last month, including

with a 6:00 pm daily curfew.

The potential advantages of a third nationwide lockdown in the fight against the spread of the [coronavirus](#) had to be weighed against its cost in "economic, social, human and sometimes even health terms", Castex said.

"This is why a new confinement can only be envisaged as a last resort," he said. "The situation today does not justify such a move."

If, however, the health situation deteriorates, the government would "not hesitate to do what is necessary", he said.

Castex said it was "not the time" to relax current restrictions, which include the closure of cafes and restaurants except for takeout meals, and of large shopping centres, and tough border restrictions, especially for non-EU travel.

In addition to the measures in place, Castex said that remote working should be encouraged "wherever possible".

Castex acknowledged that France started its vaccination programme later than other countries, but said the slow start had been due to the difficulties inherent in rolling out vaccines to older people.

By the end of the week, all residents in [care homes](#) who want to be vaccinated will have received their first jab, he said.

He also said that France would stick to a three- to four-week lag between the first and second inoculations for the Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna vaccines instead of lengthening the gap in order to get more people vaccinated, like "some other countries" were doing, a move he called "dangerous".

French vaccination centres will make an additional 1.7 million time slots available by end-March, with bookings opening next week, he added.

Castex reaffirmed the government's target of vaccinating everybody over 65 by the end of May, and all adults by "the end of the summer".

On Wednesday, the public health authority reported 26,362 new COVID cases for the previous 24 hours in France, and 358 COVID deaths. The total death toll since the start of the pandemic stood at 77,595 people.

Earlier Thursday the government said it would impose a lockdown on the French overseas department of Mayotte, an island archipelago located in the Indian Ocean with a population of around 270,000.

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