

I.Coast fears Covid 'explosion' as deaths surge

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The West African state of Ivory Coast on Friday reported that 17 people had died of coronavirus in 10 days, with the trend raising fears of an "explosion" of the disease.

The country has recorded 30,526 cases of COVID-19, of which 171 have been fatal—17 from February 1 to 11, the [health ministry](#) said.

"The epidemic's rebound is characterised by active circulation (of the virus) in the community, which raises fears of an explosion," Health Minister Eugene Aka Aouele told a press conference.

He said there were "strong suspicions" that the UK variant of the virus, which is more contagious than the original strain in the COVID pandemic, was spreading.

He called on the public to step up efforts to keep the [virus](#) at bay by increasing social distancing measures, carrying out tests at schools, limiting movement and avoiding gatherings.

Unlike other African countries, Ivory Coast does not have a lockdown or curfew, and mask-wearing is required only in enclosed public spaces.

Shops, restaurants, bars and nightclubs are open.

The country says it will start immunisation in mid-February despite a delay in deliveries of Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna vaccines, which had been scheduled to arrive in late January.

The central West African state of Gabon, meanwhile, announced Friday it would bar people from moving between the capital Libreville and outside provinces in order to combat a "major and worrying rise" in [coronavirus](#) cases since December.

It also said it was bringing forward the start of its nightly 8pm-5am curfew to 6pm.

Gabon, a country of under two million people, has documented 12,171

cases, 71 of them fatal.

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