

# Bulgaria re-imposes virus curbs as mortality rate rises

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Bulgaria will from next Monday re-impose stricter confinement measures in a bid to contain rising infection and mortality rates from a third wave of coronavirus, health officials announced Thursday.

Schools, kindergartens, restaurants, casinos, shopping malls, fitness

centres, cinemas, theatres, museums, concert halls and swimming pools will close for ten days from March 22, Health Minister Kostadin Angelov told a weekly briefing of the [coronavirus](#) taskforce.

Any festivals or other large gatherings of people, even outside, will be banned while sports events will be held without spectators.

Weddings and other private events will only be able to host up to 15 people, he added.

"Yes, it is a hard decision and politically unpopular but it is motivated by health concerns and it is right," Angelov said.

Bulgaria's government has so far had a more liberal approach to virus containment compared to other European states, with no total shutdown of non-essential stores and no ban on people leaving their homes at any time since the start of the pandemic.

Coronavirus deaths have almost doubled over the past 14 days and Bulgaria now has one of the highest COVID-19 death rates in Europe—18.7 per 100,000 people, according to an AFP database.

So far, a total of 11,715 people have died with the virus in Bulgaria and 291,769 have been infected.

Meanwhile the country is trailing in last place among EU member states when it comes to vaccinations, with only 4.1 percent of the population of 6.9 million people having received at least one dose, according to data collated by AFP.

The new measures come amid campaigning for the country's general election on April 4.

The latest poll carried out by the Trend institute showed the ruling conservative Gerb party of three-time premier Boyko Borisov with 28.8 percent of votes, ahead of the opposition socialists at 23.6 percent.

The new wave of the epidemic "increases anxiety and fear, which will result in poor voter turnout, Trend analyst Dimitar Ganev commented.

"COVID-19 is the secret of Gerb's success," he told the BGNES news agency, adding that in times of uncertainty society naturally consolidates around the status quo.

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