

Cyprus pulls back on wider easing of COVID-19 restrictions

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Cyprus on Friday put the brakes on a wider loosening of COVID-19 restrictions by keeping middle school students at home for two more weeks as the infection rate remains high, largely due to the spread of the

U.K. variant.

Health Minister Constantinos Ioannou told reporters that results from samples sent to Europe's disease prevention and control center indicate that over a quarter of [coronavirus](#) infections in Cyprus are attributed to that faster-spreading variant.

Ioannou said infections remain high among families, co-workers in both the public and private sectors, as well as in primary schools. To head off the virus' spread at the workplace, compulsory testing of at least a quarter of employees will be enacted for the rest of the month.

On top of keeping middle school students at home for more remote instruction until April, Ioannou said primary [school](#) kids will also stay home for the next couple of weeks in the southern district of Limassol where the number of infections is especially high.

Amid much complaining from bar and restaurant owners who say restrictions are ruining them, Ioannou announced that they'll be permitted to open their businesses as of March 16, but only with outdoor seating.

Meanwhile an eight-hour, night-time curfew will be shortened, starting as of next week at 11:00pm instead of 9:00pm. A restriction that requires text message approval for twice-daily excursions for people not going to work remains in effect.

Health Ministry statistics show that number of infections over the last 14 days amounted to 397.3 per 100,000 people, marking a significant increase in the last three weeks.

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