

Spain pleads for caution, to 'buy vaccines time' amid uptick

March 31 2021



People wearing face masks to protect against the spread of coronavirus walk in downtown Madrid, Spain, Wednesday, March 31, 2021. Spain is bracing for another potential sharp increase in coronavirus cases. And with the vaccine rollout being outpaced by the new more contagious variant of the virus, authorities are asking for citizens to intensify their precautions to "buy time" for the shots to arrive. (AP Photo/Manu Fernandez)

With vaccinations being outpaced by a growing wave of new infections, health authorities in Spain urged the public on Wednesday to increase precautions in order to "buy time."

The plea by Health Minister Carolina Darias came as Spain surpassed 150 infections per 100,000 inhabitants over 14 days—which national authorities consider the high-risk threshold.

"We are at a critical moment," Darias said. "We are observing an [upward trend](#) in the virus in almost every [region](#)."

Spain had stabilized its contagion rate following a sharp uptick after the Christmas holidays. Darias blamed the rise on the spread of the more contagious virus variant first identified in Britain, which she said now accounts for 60-70% of all cases in Spain.

While COVID-19 infections are rising in most Spanish regions, the increase is the sharpest in Madrid, and the northern regions of Navarra and the Basque Country. All three areas have more than 240 infections per 100,000 inhabitants over 14 days.

Spain has resisted so far returning to the strict home confinement that it enforced in the early months of the pandemic. Instead, it has tried to keep its teetering economy afloat using targeted restrictions, mainly on eating and drinking establishments, restricting travel between regions, and enforcing a nightly curfew.



People wearing face masks to protect against the spread of coronavirus attend a mass at Santa Cruz church in downtown Madrid, Spain, Wednesday, March 31, 2021. Spain is bracing for another potential sharp increase in coronavirus cases. And with the vaccine rollout being outpaced by the new more contagious variant of the virus, authorities are asking for citizens to intensify their precautions to "buy time" for the shots to arrive. (AP Photo/Manu Fernandez)



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Plagued by the same shipment delays that have hampered vaccination efforts in most of Europe, Spain is set to receive 2 million doses this week, its largest weekly amount so far. One million AstraZeneca shots will arrive on Thursday, Darias said. Batches of Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna that arrived on Monday account for the other million.

"Most of all, we need time," Darias said. "Because each week we slow

down the spread, we buy the vaccines time to prevent a fourth wave of infections."

Spain reported 154 deaths from COVID-19 since Tuesday, taking its overall toll to 75,459.

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