

# Turkey reimposes restrictions after sharp rise in infections

March 30 2021, by Suzan Fraser

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A woman wearing a mask to help protect against the spread of coronavirus, walk in the rain in Ankara, Turkey, Monday, March 29, 2021. Turkey is reinstating weekend lockdowns in most of Turkey's provinces and will also impose restrictions over the Muslim holy month of Ramadan following a sharp increase in COVID-19 cases.(AP Photo/Burhan Ozbilici)

Turkey is re-introducing weekend lockdowns in most of its provinces and will also impose restrictions over the Muslim holy month of Ramadan following a sharp increase in COVID-19 cases.

Infections in Turkey have soared less than a month after authorities divided the 81 provinces into four color-coded categories and relaxed restrictions in some provinces under a "controlled normalization" effort.

The number of infections hit a record on Tuesday, with the Health Ministry confirming 37,303 new cases in the past 24 hours. The country of nearly 84 million also reported 155 deaths on Tuesday, up from around 65 at the start of the month.

In a televised address following a Cabinet meeting late Monday, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said 58 out of Turkey's 81 provinces, including Istanbul and Ankara, were now designated as "red" or "very high-risk" areas and would be subjected to lockdowns on both Saturdays and Sundays.

Nighttime curfews that are in place across the country would continue, he said.

Only 17 provinces were in the "red" category on March 2, when schools partially resumed face-to-face education, cafes and restaurants were allowed to operate at half-capacity and weekend curfews were eased in several cities.



People wearing masks to help protect against the spread of coronavirus, walk in the rain in Ankara, Turkey, Monday, March 29, 2021. Turkey is reinstating weekend lockdowns in most of Turkey's provinces and will also impose restrictions over the Muslim holy month of Ramadan following a sharp increase in COVID-19 cases.(AP Photo/Burhan Ozbilici)

"The increase in the number of cases and patients as well as the increase in the number of deaths, is forcing us to review the existing measures," Erdogan said in an address to the nation. "The number of our provinces which are in the red category, which constitutes the very high-risk category, has reached 58—representing 80% of the population."

"We will have to make some sacrifices during the month of Ramadan,"

he said, adding that restaurants and cafes would be allowed to serve takeout food only during the holy month, which starts on April 13 in Turkey.

Mass gatherings for Ramadan meals held before sunrise and after sunset would be barred, he also announced.

The Turkish Medical Association meanwhile, blamed the increase in infections on inadequate contact-tracing, the government's reluctance to impose measures in a timely manner out of economic concerns as well as the premature relaxing of the restrictions.





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"We, as healthcare professionals and society, are paying for these wrong policies," the group said on Twitter.

Erdogan has come under intense criticism for holding his ruling party's congresses inside packed sport complexes across the country, despite a new surge of COVID-19 cases. He has been accused of double standards for disregarding the government's own social distancing rules. In one such event, Erdogan boasted about the size of the crowds.

Critics say the political rallies have likely contributed to the surge. Health Minister Fahrettin Koca told reporters Tuesday that he saw no benefit in "keeping the issue on the agenda."

Variants of the initial coronavirus now account for around 75% of the cases in Turkey, he said.

The minister also said Turkey has received 2.8 million doses of the Pfizer-BioNtech vaccine and is set to receive 1.7 million more within the next 10 days.



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Turkey rolled out its inoculation program in January with the vaccine developed by China's Sinovac company. More than 15 million shots have been administered so far. Around 6.7 million people have received two doses.

The total number of infections in the country since the start of the outbreak last year stands at more than 3.2 million. The COVID-19 death toll has reached more than 31,000.

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