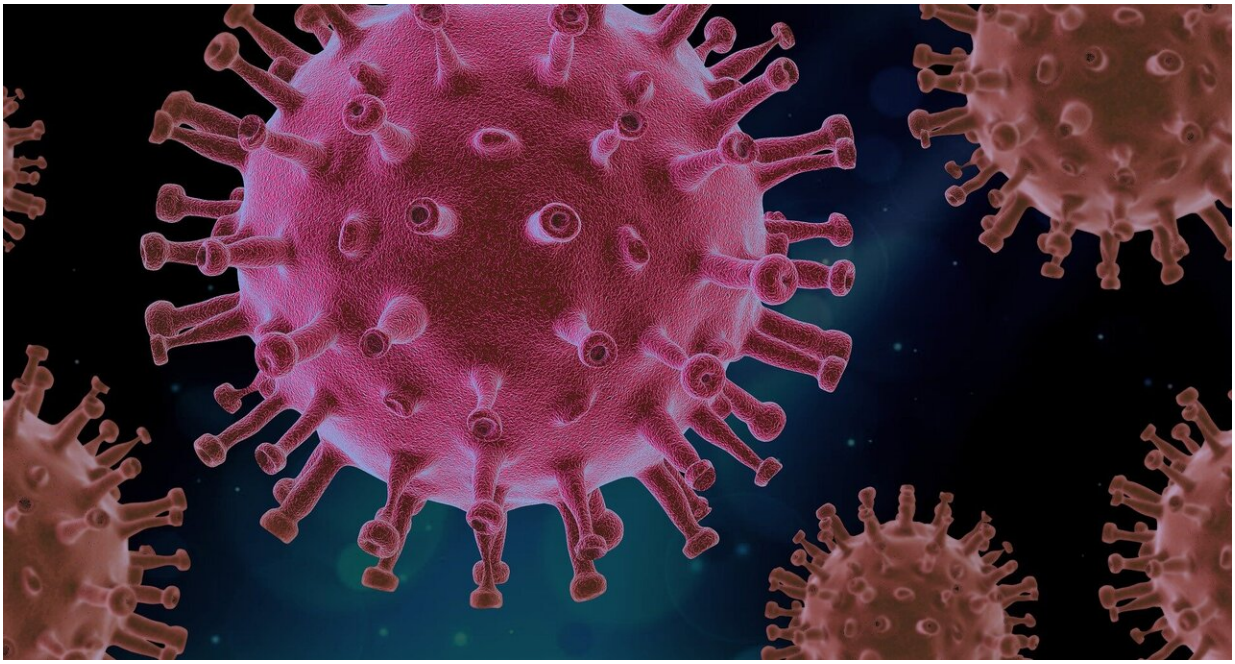
New virus lockdown looms for Belgium

March 23 2021



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Belgium appears headed for a new lockdown to stem a variant-fuelled surge in COVID infections, according to reports on the eve of an emergency government meeting set for Wednesday.

Prime Minister Alexander De Croo is to chair the gathering of national and regional officials to decide measures to get a grip on worrying infection and hospitalisation figures.

Officials were considering closing schools from Monday, a week ahead of Easter vacations, and keeping them shut for three weeks, as well as expanding a nighttime curfew already in place and closing non-essential shops, Belgian media reported.

A government spokesman on the virus crisis, Yves Van Laethem, on Tuesday told a news conference that COVID-19 infections have risen more than 40 percent compared to a week ago and hospital admissions were up 12 percent.

All age groups were affected—including those over 90—across all of the country, he said, declaring: "The numbers are flashing red, as is the map."

With Belgium already subject to a nighttime curfew, a work-from-home edict and a general travel ban into and out of the country, the blame was put on the spread of the UK variant of the virus, which is more contagious and more severe in its effects.

A Belgian virologist, Marc Van Ranst, said the fact there were 282 new hospital admissions in the previous 24 hours was a "trigger" for urgent action.

He told De Morgen newspaper: "We have to be realistic. If we take measures now, we will abandon them at the earliest at the end of the Easter holidays. That's three weeks."

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Citation: New virus lockdown looms for Belgium (2021, March 23) retrieved 18 April 2024 from https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-03-virus-lockdown-looms-belgium.html

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