

Kiev to ease restrictions as COVID cases decline

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The mayor of Ukraine's capital Kiev on Wednesday announced strict coronavirus measures in the city would be eased later this week as the number of new infections slowly drops.

Ex-Soviet Ukraine had recently been battered by a surge of new cases

and deaths, including in Kiev, prompting authorities to tighten sweeping measures to curb the spread of the virus, including shuttering schools and malls.

They are set to reopen Saturday alongside cinemas, gyms, and [public transport](#), which had been restricted for use by essential workers only, Kiev Mayor Vitali Klitschko said.

Schools are set to reopen next Wednesday, the [mayor](#) added, following public holidays at the beginning of the week.

Remaining restrictions, like maintaining social distance and masks in public, will be eased "gradually," Klitschko said.

"The [infection](#) rate in Kiev has slightly decreased, but it is too early to say that we have overcome the challenges," he said in an online briefing.

Authorities in the capital had been hesitant to reimpose restrictions when cases surged over fears of damaging the economy of one of Europe's poorest countries.

The measures came into force gradually, with cinemas and cafes closed in March and schools and public transport shuttered earlier in April.

"I understand that everyone wants to return to normal life. I understand that business is suffering. But the main thing today is to preserve people's lives and health," the mayor said.

Officials in Kiev, a city of around three million people, recorded 1,070 new cases and 40 deaths Wednesday.

Those new numbers show a [downward trend](#) in fresh infections when compared to 1,673 new cases April 22 and 1,886 on April 8.

Ukraine, with a population of around 40 million people, has struggled during the pandemic.

It recorded 9,590 new cases and 441 deaths Wednesday. In total, there have been over 2 million infections and more than 43,000 deaths.

A [vaccination drive](#) was launched at the end of February and some 560,000 people have so far received a first shot.

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