

Madrid slows down vaccine jabs over Easter despite govt plea

April 1 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)

Spain's Madrid region halted COVID-19 vaccinations Thursday at health centers for four days so medical staff can rest over the Easter holiday, despite pleas from the national government not to halt the fight against surging infections.

The shutdown came as the country scrambles to make up for lost time in its national vaccination plan due to supply shortfalls.

Health Minister Carolina Darias last week urged regional authorities to keep vaccinating over the Easter break, saying it was "very important" to keep up the inoculation program. Spain, like other European Union nations, has had a surprisingly slow vaccine rollout that authorities blame on vaccine shortages.

In response to criticism from [political opponents](#), which came about a month before a regional election, the Madrid regional government said its health centers stepped up vaccinations earlier this week to compensate for the closures.

It also noted that vaccine shots will still be administered at a city hospital and a city soccer stadium over the traditional Easter break.

Regional [health](#) chief Enrique Ruiz Escudero received his vaccination Thursday at the stadium and told reporters that Madrid had set a new record of daily COVID-19 vaccinations the previous day, at almost 35,000.

Thursday—also known as Holy Thursday to Catholics—was a public holiday in the Madrid region, and its [health centers](#)—which are inoculating people over 80 and those unable to care for themselves—stayed closed. They reopen Monday.



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)



A worker prepares to close a bar beside customers, in Pamplona, northern Spain, Thursday, March 31, 2021, as new measures against the coronavirus began in the Navarra province and other regions of the country where all bars without terraces will be closing to prevent the spread COVI-19. (AP Photo/Alvaro Barrientos)

Spain's 16 other regions were reported to be administering vaccines as normal.

As of Thursday, Spain had fully vaccinated 2.6 million people, or almost 10% of a target group of 27.4 million that the government aims to inoculate by the end of September. Still, that is only 5.5% of the nation's total population. Spain has seen over 75,000 deaths in the pandemic.



A worker prepares to close a bar in Pamplona, northern Spain, Thursday, March 31, 2021, as new measures against the coronavirus began in the Navarra province and other regions of the country where all bars without terraces will be closing to prevent the spread COVI-19. (AP Photo/Alvaro Barrientos)



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Spain's daily number of new COVID-19 infections has edged higher in recent weeks. It has now surpassed what authorities consider the high-risk threshold of 150 infections per 100,000 inhabitants over 14 days.

Darias, the [health minister](#), pleaded with people to be cautious over Easter, saying Spain needed to buy time to vaccinate people before a possible new surge in cases.

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