

France closing in on 20 million target in Covid vaccination drive

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France is on track to reach its goal Saturday of 20 million initial doses of coronavirus vaccines, officials said days ahead of a hugely anticipated reopening of restaurant terraces as the government begins lifting a nationwide lockdown.

"Again nearly 600,000 vaccinations today," Health Minister Olivier Veran tweeted late Friday. "Tomorrow, 20 million French will have had at least one dose," which would represent nearly 30 percent of the population.

"I'm reasonably optimistic," Prime Minister Jean Castex told journalists while visiting the mass vaccination site at the Porte de Versailles conference centre in Paris.

"It's a very important moment for the entire country, because it supports our prospects for ending this crisis," he said.

The government aims to have 30 million initial doses injected by June 15, when President Emmanuel Macron has said all adults will be able to sign up for a jab currently reserved for priority groups and adults over 50.

"It's within reach," Castex said.

Authorities also reported further declines in the number of patients requiring [intensive care](#) in hospitals.

The number of people in intensive care stood at 4,352 on Friday, a decline of 90 from the previous day and well below the peak of 6,001 during the "third wave" of infections that battered France starting in March.

On Wednesday, museums, theatres, cinemas and [concert halls](#) will reopen with limited capacity after six weeks of closure to halt the pandemic, and the nationwide curfew will be pushed back to 9:00 pm (1900 GMT) from 7 pm.

Non-essential shops will also reopen and outdoor seating at cafes and restaurants will be allowed for the first time since October 30.

Cafes and restaurants will be able to serve clients indoors on June 9, and the curfew will be fully lifted on June 30 if infection rates continue to decline.

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