

French hope bad weather won't rain off virus reopening

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With coronavirus vaccinations accelerating and infections down, the French are looking forward to the loosening of many coronavirus restrictions Wednesday, although outdoor lunches at restaurants risk being rained off.

Groups of up to six will be able to eat together as restaurant terraces open at 50-percent capacity, joining museums, theatres and cinemas, while the curfew will be pushed back from 7 to 9:00 pm.

It is the latest step in a gradual reopening plan that began with allowing inter-regional travel from the start of May.

"Resuming [social contact](#) is one of the factors in public wellbeing," public [health](#) chief Jerome Salomon told the JDD Sunday newspaper.

Some restaurant owners were already complaining about the limits on hospitality, especially given the risk of rain in what has so far been a wet May.

"Imagine you get the whole machine started again, create a new menu, get all your staff back, but then you have to cancel everything and throw your merchandise away because it's raining," star chef Philippe Etchebest told the JDD.

What's more, less than half of restaurants across France even have space for outdoor dining, he said.

"Impossible," Etchebest concluded, adding that he would wait until the next turn of the ratchet on June 9, when some indoor dining and drinking will be allowed.

'Emergency brakes' still possible

Cinemas can open at up to 35-percent capacity from Wednesday, with new films jostling for space on the big screen alongside autumn releases that had their run cut short.

Museums, theatres, zoos, libraries and all shops will be allowed to reopen at partial capacity.

Like other nations, France's reopening is possible thanks to ebbing infection numbers and an accelerating vaccination scheme, with 20.3 million people having received a first jab so far and 8.8 million with both doses.

The government aims to reach 30 million first doses by mid-June and is now offering next-day appointments not claimed by over-50s to anyone over 18.

Health ministry officials have not ruled out bringing forward the June 15 date, when all adults will be able to book a vaccine appointment without restrictions.

President Emmanuel Macron has nevertheless warned that if infections again pick up dangerously, the government could hit the "emergency brakes" on the reopening.

"We won't reach collective immunity until we've succeeded with vaccinations and reduced circulation of the virus to a minimum," public health chief Salomon said.

A "health pass" and checks on incoming travellers, especially from hotspots such as India, would remain crucial, he added.

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