

Spain: Expert warns that virus surge could follow parties

May 10 2021, by Aritz Parra



People crowded on the beach in Barcelona, Spain, Sunday, May 9, 2021. Barcelona residents were euphoric as the clock stroke midnight, ending a six-month-long national state of emergency and consequently, the local curfew. Spain is relaxing overall measures to contain the coronavirus this weekend, allowing residents to travel across regions, but some regional chiefs are complaining that a patchwork of approaches will replace the six-month-long national state of emergency that ends at midnight on Saturday. (AP Photo/Emilio Morenatti)

Spain's top coronavirus expert on Monday delivered a stern warning to citizens who are acting as if the pandemic has ended now that the government has relaxed measures against the spread of the coronavirus amid an accelerating rollout of vaccines.

Scenes of revelers partying in mass over the past weekend, in many cases without social distancing or masks, have infuriated many, including [health workers](#), and created a new political quarrel. The street celebrations followed the end of a state of emergency, a blanket national rule that allowed authorities to take strict measures against the virus such as travel bans, nighttime curfews and curbs on social gatherings.

Fernando Simón, who heads the Health Ministry's emergency coordination center, said that he was unable to predict how the contagion rate would evolve after the euphoric scenes.

"Until two days ago I would had been able to say that the downward trend of the past few days would continue. But right now, neither I nor anybody else in Spain knows what will happen," Simón said Monday.

Simón took as a personal failure having failed to transmit the urgency of being cautious to people, but also to members of the media and politicians who had turned the end of the most sweeping restrictions into a celebration.

"We don't know how many people will be admitted in ICUs," the official added. "I hope that the impact will be limited, but nobody knows."



Greece's Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, left, welcomes his Spanish counterpart Pedro Sanchez at Maximos Mansion in Athens, Monday, May 10, 2021. Sanchez is in Athens as part of a Delphi Economic Forum meeting. (AP Photo/Michael Varaklas)

Spain's two-week rate of infection, a variable closely watched by epidemiologists, fell to 188 new cases per 100,000 residents on Monday from 198 on Friday. The variable closely watched by epidemiologists peaked at nearly 900 at the end of January and has since then been on the way down barring a mild uptick in mid-March.

The country has recorded more than 3.5 million confirmed [coronavirus](#) cases since the beginning of the pandemic and over 78,000 deaths.

Opposition parties have blamed Spain's ruling center-left coalition for not extending the state of emergency or devising new legislation that would prevent the country's 17 regional governments from having to get a court's approval to impose measures that restrict basic freedoms.

But Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez on Monday repeated that he considered the current legal framework as sufficient to fight the pandemic.

Simón said that he expected that any new infections would hit harder people under 60, an age group in which only those with essential jobs have received coronavirus jabs.

The expert said that he believed the impact on older people could be lower.

Nearly one in three of Spain's 47 million residents has received at least one coronavirus vaccine shot and 6 million people, most of them above 70, are fully vaccinated.

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