

Tunisia orders lockdown amid 'worst' ever health crisis

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Tunisia ordered a partial lockdown from Sunday for the week-long Eid al-Fitr holidays, warning that any further increase in coronavirus infections could overwhelm specialist care facilities.

Announcing the measure on Friday, Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi said Tunisia was going through "the worst health crisis in its history".

Mosques, markets and non-essential businesses will be closed under the new restrictions, which come as Muslims mark the end of the holy fasting month of Ramadan, Mechichi told reporters.

"Health institutions are at risk of collapse," Mechichi said, adding that medics were stretched to the limit, with around 100 people a day dying of COVID-19.

More than 500 people are currently in [intensive care](#), an unprecedented number that has required medics to set up field hospitals, and the North African country is struggling to meet the demand for oxygen.

Under new rules, travel will be banned between regions, gatherings and celebrations prohibited, and a 7:00 pm to 5:00 am curfew imposed.

Tunisians are encouraged to leave their homes only for what is strictly necessary, government spokeswoman Hasna Ben Slimane said.

The Mediterranean country, with a population of around 12 million, has recorded more than 300,000 [coronavirus](#) cases and over 11,200 deaths.

Tunisia's economy has lurched from one crisis to another since the country's 2011 revolution, with GDP estimated to have contracted by a record 8.2 percent last year.

Mechichi had said several times in recent weeks that Tunisia is unable to afford to repeat the restrictions put in place in March 2020 at the start of the pandemic.

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