

Dutch leader says easing lockdown was 'error of judgment'

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Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte arrives for an EU summit at the European Council building in Brussels, Thursday, June 24, 2021. At their summit in Brussels, EU leaders are set to take stock of coronavirus recovery plans, study ways to improve relations with Russia and Turkey, and insist on the need to develop migration partners with the countries of northern Africa, but a heated exchange over a new LGBT bill in Hungary is also likely. Credit: John Thys, Pool Photo via AP

The Dutch leader apologized Monday for what he called "an error of judgment" in relaxing the Netherlands' coronavirus lockdown, a move that has led to a sharp surge in infections.

Caretaker Prime Minister Mark Rutte's government scrapped most remaining restrictions just over three weeks ago amid declining [infection](#) numbers and hospital admissions. The easing meant that, among other [public spaces](#), nightclubs and discotheques were allowed to reopen for the first time in more than a year.

On the first weekend after the relaxation, thousands of mainly [young people](#) flocked to clubs in towns and cities across the country. Since then, infections have skyrocketed. Rutte was forced to backtrack and on Friday [reintroduced some measures to rein in the virus' spread](#).

On Saturday, the country's public health institute reported more than 10,000 new COVID-19 cases, the highest number of positive tests since late December.

"An error of judgment was made, we are sorry about that," Rutte told reporters in The Hague.

Caretaker Health Minister Hugo de Jonge said the relaxation combined with a lack of social distancing and the delta variant "has had, of course, an accelerating effect. You can unfortunately see that with hindsight."

The Netherlands is not alone in facing soaring infections. Countries across Europe are [scrambling to accelerate coronavirus vaccinations](#) in the hope of outpacing the spread of the more infectious delta variant.

More than 46% of the Netherlands' [adult population](#) is fully vaccinated

and more than 77% of adults have had at least one shot. Health authorities say they will administer first or second shots to more than 1.3 million people this week.

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