

Israel scrambles to curb jump in COVID infections

July 1 2021



Medical personnel test Israeli children the coronavirus at a basketball court turned into a coronavirus testing center, in Binyamina, Israel, Tuesday, June 29, 2021. Israel's prime minister is urging the country's youth to get vaccinated as coronavirus case numbers have crept up in recent days due to a localized outbreak of the Delta variant. Credit: AP Photo/Ariel Schalit

Israel, a world leader in coronavirus vaccinations, reported its highest daily infection rate in three months as it scrambles to contain the spread of the new delta variant.

Authorities are racing to vaccinate children and are considering tighter travel restrictions at the country's main airport.

The Health Ministry on Thursday reported 307 new cases on Wednesday, the highest in nearly three months and a rise from 293 newly-diagnosed cases a day earlier. The health ministry reportedly expects those numbers to jump in coming days, raising concerns that Israel is plunging back toward a crisis.

In recent months, Israel has reopened businesses, schools and event venues, lifting nearly all restrictions after it inoculated some 85% of the adult population. It's now seen as an early-warning system of sorts for other nations.

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett on Tuesday announced a drive to inoculate thousands of children by mid-month.

Though worrying, the trend still shows little uptick when it comes to deaths from the virus. In the past two weeks, the ministry recorded only one. In Israel, 5.1 million people, among its population of 9.3 million, have received the required double dose of vaccinations. Another 400,000 have received at least one dose.



Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett smiles as he adjusts his protective mask during his visit to a Maccabi healthcare maintenance organisation (HMO) outlet which offers vaccinations against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Holon, near Tel Aviv, Israel Tuesday, June 29, 2021. Credit: Amir Cohen/Pool Photo via AP

Israel recorded its highest number of vaccinations of children this week and has re-imposed a rule requiring people to wear masks indoors. Bennett for the first time appointed a coronavirus commissioner to manage arrivals at the main gateway into Israel, Ben Gurion International Airport, which he called "a huge national vulnerability."

Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked on Wednesday said officials are prepared to close the airport if the trend worsens.

Israel's Haaretz newspaper reported that officials are considering bringing back the "Green Pass" system that differentiates between vaccinated and non-vaccinated citizens in access to certain venues and activities.

Israel's government last week postponed the planned reopening of the country to vaccinated tourists over concerns about the [spread of the delta variant](#).



A medical worker tests an Israeli youth for the coronavirus at a basketball court turned into a coronavirus testing center, in Binyamina, Israel, Tuesday, June 29, 2021. Israel's prime minister is urging the country's youth to get vaccinated as coronavirus case numbers have crept up in recent days due to a localized outbreak of the Delta variant. Credit: AP Photo/Ariel Schalit



Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett looks on as he stands behind a bodyguard during his visit to a Maccabi healthcare maintenance organisation (HMO) outlet which offers vaccinations against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Holon, near Tel Aviv, Israel Tuesday, June 29, 2021. Credit: Amir Cohen/Pool Photo via AP



Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett gestures as he delivers a statement during his visit to a Maccabi healthcare maintenance organisation (HMO) outlet which offers vaccinations against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Holon, near Tel Aviv, Israel Tuesday, June 29, 2021. Credit: Amir Cohen/Pool Photo via AP



A medical worker tests a woman for the coronavirus at a basketball court turned into a coronavirus testing center, in Binyamina, Israel, Tuesday, June 29, 2021. Israel's prime minister is urging the country's youth to get vaccinated as coronavirus case numbers have crept up in recent days due to a localized outbreak of the Delta variant. Credit: AP Photo/Ariel Schalit



A Medical worker tests an Israeli boy for the coronavirus at a basketball court turned into a coronavirus testing center, in Binyamina, Israel, Tuesday, June 29, 2021. Israel's prime minister is urging the country's youth to get vaccinated as coronavirus case numbers have crept up in recent days due to a localized outbreak of the Delta variant. Credit: AP Photo/Ariel Schalit



Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, left, looks on during his visit to a Maccabi healthcare maintenance organisation (HMO) outlet which offers vaccinations against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Holon, near Tel Aviv, Israel Tuesday, June 29, 2021. Credit: Amir Cohen/Pool Photo via AP



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Israel was initially set to reopen its borders to vaccinated visitors on Thursday, after having largely closed the country during the pandemic. It had already started allowing groups of vaccinated tourists to enter in May.

But after a rise in infections over the past 10 days, the government pushed that date to Aug. 1.

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Citation: Israel scrambles to curb jump in COVID infections (2021, July 1) retrieved 26 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-07-israel-scrambles-curb-covid-infections.html>

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