

Malta closes borders to unvaccinated travellers

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Malta said Friday it would be the first European country to close its borders to anyone who has not been fully vaccinated against coronavirus, following a spike in COVID-19 cases.

Only those in possession of a British or European vaccination certificate

will be allowed in from July 14, health minister Chris Fearne said—suggesting US tourists and others will be barred.

"We will be the first country in Europe to take this step," he told a news conference.

Malta has been hailed as a European success story for its vaccination campaign, with 79 percent of the adult population currently fully vaccinated.

But from reporting no new cases and having just 28 active cases on June 27, the Mediterranean island nation on Friday reported 96 new virus infections, taking the total number of active cases up to 252.

"From Wednesday July 14, anyone coming to Malta must be in possession of a recognised vaccination certificate: a Maltese certificate, a British certificate, or a European Union certificate," Fearne told reporters.

Previously visitors from the rest of the EU, the United States and some other countries were allowed in if they showed a negative PCR coronavirus test, or if they were fully vaccinated.

Under the new rules, a vaccination [certificate](#) will be enough although young children will have to present a negative PCR test.

Fearne said around 90 percent of the cases being found in Malta are among unvaccinated people, and that many have been traced to English Language Schools.

Cases have been confirmed at nine schools so far, and as a result, all English Language Schools will have to shut their doors from July 14.

The Maltese government only recently launched a financial incentive scheme to attract language students from abroad.

Asked whether it was "fair" to impose mandatory vaccination requirements at such short notice, Fearne said: "It is not fair to put locals who cannot get vaccinated at risk.

"We have to look after our residents first."

Unlike other areas in Europe, the spike in cases of coronavirus in Malta has not been put down to the Delta variant, which is believed to be more contagious.

Health superintendent Charmaine Gauci said on Friday that only seven of the country's 252 active cases were identified as of the Delta variant.

Malta has in recent weeks been emerging from months of coronavirus restrictions.

"We are not changing other parts of our plan for now, but we will do so if the science suggests we should," the health minister said.

Malta has had 30,851 cases of the virus so far, recording 420 deaths.

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