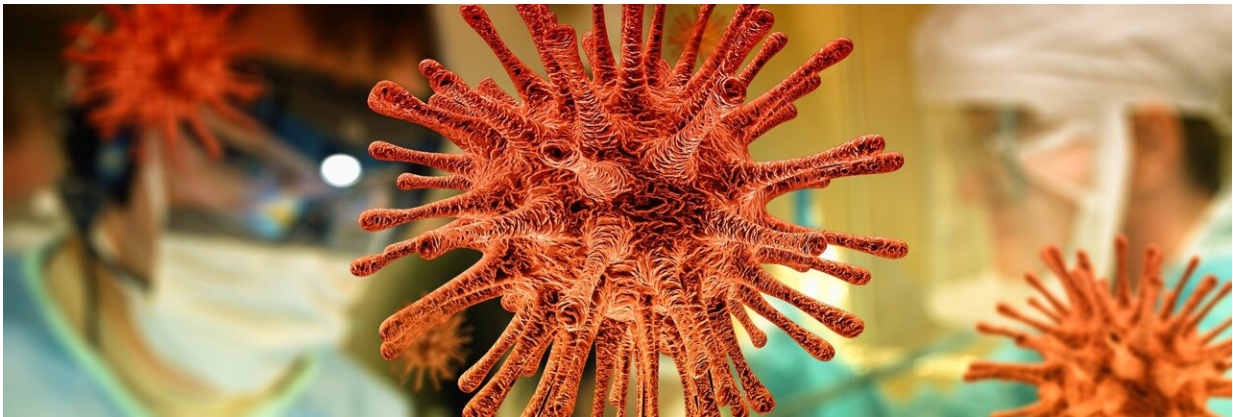


Spain court orders end to Barcelona virus curfew

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A Spanish court on Thursday lifted a coronavirus curfew imposed on most of Catalonia, including the capital Barcelona, leaving it in place in just a fraction of the northeastern region.

Catalonia's government in mid-July imposed a nightly curfew between 1:00 am and 6:00 am in most municipalities to fight a surge in virus cases, and the region's top [court](#) then gave the green light to extend it three times.

But on Friday, faced with a request by the regional government to keep the curfew in place in 148 municipalities, the High Court of Justice of

Catalonia said the measure was "not justified" in 129 of them, because infection rates there had improved.

"In these circumstances, the measures are not so much justified on health grounds, but for reasons of security or public order," the court said in its ruling.

The Catalan government said in a statement it was "analysing" the court's ruling, but added it "regrets that once again judges are acting as epidemiologists".

The curfew is intended to discourage social gatherings on beaches and in parks after nightclubs close at 12.30 am, which was suspected of fuelling a spike in cases of the highly-contagious Delta variant, especially among unvaccinated young people.

Images of large groups of youths gathering on Barcelona's beaches or in popular nightlife districts have become common since Spain lifted a nationwide night-time curfew in early May.

The court did however keep in place for one more week a ban on public or private gatherings of more than 10 people throughout Catalonia.

Falling infections

Like the rest of Spain, the region which is popular with tourists has seen its number of infections drop in recent weeks.

When Catalonia imposed the curfew in mid-July it had an infection rate double Spain's national average, with more than 1,000 cases per 100,000 inhabitants over 14 days.

But on Wednesday that figure had fallen to 328, lower than the national

average of 378, according to the health ministry's latest figures.

In Barcelona, Spain's second-largest city, the rate is down to 130 cases per 100,000 people.

Catalonia's hospitals, however, remain under pressure.

Forty-two percent of the region's intensive care unit beds are occupied by Covid-19 patients, double the national average.

The Catalan government at the end of July suspended routine surgeries to free up hospital resources.

It also set up mobile vaccination units to target areas with lower inoculation rates and deployed drones to monitor beaches and prevent crowding.

Spain has fully vaccinated 64.1 percent of its population against the virus, one of the highest rates in Europe.

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