

New Caledonia locks down again over COVID cases

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New Caledonia will impose a new coronavirus lockdown starting Tuesday after three new cases were confirmed in the South Pacific French territory that had been declared "COVID free," officials said.

Local authorities ordered strict travel restrictions at the start of the pandemic to avoid an outbreak that would overwhelm hospitals on the islands.

Previously just 139 positive COVID-19 cases had been recorded among the population of around 290,000, and no deaths.

But [vaccine hesitancy](#) among the indigenous Kanak population means many people remain vulnerable.

Just 30 percent of residents are currently vaccinated, compared with 73 percent having at least one dose for France overall.

The government announced last week that vaccination would now be mandatory for all adults.

"The virus is spreading and it's likely that several dozens of Caledonians are now infected," said the territory's president, Louis Mapou.

Schools and universities will be shut for the next 15 days, and [face masks](#) will be required outside.

People can go out only for work or for essential activities such as medical visits, or for a maximum one hour of sport within one kilometre of their homes.

Flights to and from the territory, as well as intra-island flights, are suspended indefinitely except for medical personnel.

Already anyone arriving to New Caledonia has to quarantine for 15 days at government-requisitioned lodgings—a rule that prevented President Emmanuel Macron from visiting when he travelled to nearby French Polynesia in July.

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