

Belgium poised to boost COVID-19 measures to counter surge

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In this May 6, 2021 file photo, Belgian doctor Peter Theerens administers the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine to an elderly patient during a house call in Antwerp, Belgium. The government warned Thursday, Oct. 21, 2021 that Belgium could well be on the cusp of another major surge in COVID-19 cases despite its high rate of vaccinations. Credit: AP Photo/Virginia Mayo, File

Belgium is poised to reinforce pandemic measures in an attempt to stunt a sharp increase of coronavirus cases, with officials indicating Monday that they are looking at increased mandatory use of face masks and virus passports.

The [national government](#) and regional authorities brought forward their COVID-19 coordination meeting by three days and will decide Tuesday how to counter the sudden surge of virus infections.

Requirements for the use of masks and some other measures were only relaxed early this month, and the easing could be partly turned back. Health Minister Frank Vandenbroucke, however, said that drastic restrictions were still out of the question.

"Bars and restaurants will remain open. Kids must go to school—it's important. But maybe we will be going back to more face masks," he told VRT network. He has said the nation of 11 million people is already in the fourth surge of the coronavirus in 1½ years.

One measure under consideration would require the use of the Corona passport, by which people must show they are fully vaccinated, had a recent negative virus test or recovered from COVID-19 within the previous six months.

Belgium's weekend data for [pandemic](#) cases will only be available Tuesday but over the past week figures have started to balloon again, with infections 65% higher and [hospital admissions](#) up by a third.



In this Friday, Nov. 6, 2020 file photo, Medical personnel work in the intensive care ward for COVID-19 patients at the MontLegia CHC hospital in Liege, Belgium. The government warned Thursday, Oct. 21, 2021 that Belgium could well be on the cusp of another major surge in COVID-19 cases despite its high rate of vaccinations. Credit: AP Photo/Francisco Seco, File

There are worries about cases spiking again even though 85% of the [adult population](#) is vaccinated.

Belgium's deliberations are matched in the neighboring Netherlands, where the government is seeking advice from experts on whether it needs to reintroduce pandemic restrictions amid sharply rising infection rates. The Netherlands has one of the fastest rising [infection](#) rates in Europe.

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