

Latvia goes back into lockdown as COVID rate spikes

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Latvia plunged back into lockdown on Thursday with non-essential shops closed and cinema, theatres and hairdressers shutting down for a month in a bid to break the world's worst COVID rate.

Latvia has seen 1,406 COVID infections per 100,000 inhabitants over

the last 14 days, the highest per capita rate in the world as of October 20, according to an AFP calculation.

Its Baltic neighbours of Lithuania and Estonia followed close behind with 1,221 cases and 1,126 cases respectively.

Only around half the population in Latvia is fully vaccinated—the fourth worst vaccination rate in the European Union after Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia.

"I apologise to those who have already been vaccinated, but the restrictions will apply to everyone," Prime Minister Krisjanis Karins told reporters when the measures were approved on Monday following a 10-hour cabinet meeting.

"There are still too many [unvaccinated people](#) who get infected with COVID and die in the hospital," he added.

The lockdown is due to last until November 15 and will include a curfew between 8 pm and 5 am, as well as a takeout-only policy for restaurants.

Most people will be required to work remotely.

Schools will also switch to [remote learning](#), though children in kindergarten and the first three [elementary grades](#) will continue to attend lessons in person.

Hospitals throughout the country of 1.9 million people have stopped treating people with cancer and other diseases, focusing only on COVID patients requiring [intensive care](#).

Latvia earlier this month declared a three-month state of emergency to bolster mask-wearing and vaccinations.

A few days later, Latvian President Egils Levits was diagnosed with COVID-19 last week despite being fully vaccinated.

Also this month, a scientific advisory group on COVID said it was no longer going to work with the government because its advice during the summer had been ignored.

"There must be demand from the government for academic expertise but our current experience shows that there is no such demand from the cabinet at all," the scientists said in a statement.

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