

Belgians, Dutch face new COVID-19 measures to curb new spike

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A woman wears a face mask to protect herself against the coronavirus as she passes by an empty terrace in the Marolles quarter in Brussels, Belgium, Nov. 17, 2021. As countries across Europe reimpose lockdowns in response to surging COVID-19 cases and deaths, the UK – long one of Europe's hardest-hit countries—carries on with a policy of keeping everything as normal as possible. Credit: AP Photo/Olivier Matthys, File

Belgium and the Netherlands are taking new measures Friday in an attempt to keep a COVID-19 spike from spiraling out of control, hoping that action now will safeguard the joys of Christmas next month.

Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo had to reinforce measures for the second time in a week and closed night clubs, while bars and restaurants have to close at 11 p.m. for the next three weeks.

Spikes in cases and [hospital admissions](#) exceeded even the worst medical predictions, forcing Belgium into quick action.

"We have been hoodwinked by the delta variant," he said of the very contagious version of COVID-19.

He said that there were over 25,000 cases a day now in the country of 11 million. "This is unprecedented in our country."

Neighboring Netherlands has been struggling with the virus just as much. The Dutch government is expected to announce an expansion of a partial lockdown that has been in place for two weeks amid swiftly rising infections and ICU admissions.

Caretaker Prime Minister Mark Rutte and Health Minister Hugo de Jonge are scheduled to give a televised news conference at 7 p.m. (1800 GMT) to outline new measures.

Bars and restaurants that already have to close their doors at 8 p.m. could be ordered to shut even earlier. "That we need measures—tough measures—is beyond doubt," De Jonge said Thursday.

He said a panel of experts that advises the government on its coronavirus policies has advised measures that will force a turnaround in the rising line of infections.

"That turnaround won't happen on its own," De Jonge said.

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