

Hospitals in southern Dutch province raise COVID-19 alarm

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Hospitals in the southern Dutch province of Limburg warned the government Tuesday that they can no longer cope with new COVID-19 patients amid soaring rates of coronavirus infections.

Five hospitals in the province that borders both Belgium and Germany raised the alarm in a statement that said: "We are heading straight for a

healthcare blockage and the entire system is grinding to a standstill."

They added that, "we are convinced that other parts of the Netherlands will soon follow."

Amid an autumn surge across much of Europe, the seven-day rolling average of daily new cases in the Netherlands has almost doubled over the past two weeks from 30.88 to 61.12 new cases per 100,000 people despite more than 80% of the adult population being fully vaccinated.

The Netherlands' public health institute reported Tuesday that 204 COVID-19 patients were admitted to intensive care units in hospitals across the country over the past week, a 40% increase compared with the previous week.

The caretaker Dutch government last week [reintroduced an order to wear face masks](#) in public places like stores and libraries and mandated an extension for the use of COVID-19 passes. Both measures came into force over the weekend. The administration is scheduled to meet again Friday to discuss possible further measures if the soaring numbers do not ease.

The hospitals in Limburg said in their statement that their occupancy levels are now the same as the end of December last year—when the Netherlands was in lockdown.

"This time, however, there is no prospect of a solution—after all, society is open—but it seems as if the care organizations and employees are the only ones who still have this sense of crisis and urgency," they said. "We feel alone in this struggle."

They appealed for an immediate start to a campaign to give booster shots to vulnerable people and health care workers. The booster campaign is

expected to start next month.

Health Minister Hugo de Jonge said Tuesday that the government is researching whether the campaign can start sooner.

"If it can happen quicker, we will do it quicker," De Jonge told reporters.

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