

Iceland tightens COVID rules as cases surge

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Iceland on Friday said it would tighten its COVID rules as it battles a rise in new cases, including capping gatherings and mandating masks in crowded areas.

The new measures were announced after the World Health Organization said Thursday that Europe was facing an alarming surge in cases,

warning another 500,000 could die by February.

Iceland has recorded 179 new infections in the past 24 hours, a record since the start of the pandemic, according to [health authorities](#).

"It's uncomfortable to see how steep the curve is and the increase is greater than what we've seen before," [health](#) minister Svandís Svavarsdóttir told reporters following a ministerial meeting.

The government said one-metre social distancing should be maintained in all [public spaces](#).

Where this is not possible masks should be worn—especially in shops—a rule that will be compulsory again from Saturday.

The limit on the number of people allowed at public gatherings will be lowered to 500 people as of Wednesday, down from the current cap of 2,000.

Bars and clubs will also have to close their doors at 11:00 pm, two hours earlier than what is currently allowed.

The restrictions will remain in place for at least four weeks.

"The daily number of infections must be reduced to 40-50 and this situation must be maintained with restrictions until a better collective immunity is reached thanks to vaccine boosters and natural infections," the Ministry of Health explained in a statement.

Before the rise in cases, existing restrictions still in force were scheduled to be lifted on November 18.

While 89 percent of the population aged over 12 is fully vaccinated in

the Nordic country, the country's chief epidemiologist on Friday called for a [third dose](#) for all people over 16 who have been fully vaccinated "for about six months".

"The usefulness of a booster dose to strengthen the immunity of each individual and society as a whole has now become very clear," Thorolfur Gudnason said.

Iceland, with a population of 375,000, has had a total of 14,255 cases of COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic and 34 deaths.

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