

'Flashing red': Belgium tightens rules amid COVID-19 surge

November 17 2021, by Raf Casert



A woman wears a face mask to protect against the coronavirus as she visits the Marrolles flea market in Brussels, Belgium, Wednesday, Nov. 17, 2021. Belgium's coronavirus consultative committee has issued new measures to combat rising coronavirus infections and deaths. Credit: AP Photo/Olivier Matthys

Belgium extended the use of facemasks and mandatory remote work on Wednesday in an attempt to contain a new surge of COVID-19 cases.

"The alarm signals are flashing red," said Prime Minister Alexander De Croo.

The premier added that the mandatory use of facemasks in crowded places would now include those 10 and older and that remote work, when possible, would be mandatory for 4 days in the 5-day workweek until Dec. 12.

Up to now, facemasks had been limited to those 12 and over and remote work had been a recommendation only, but not mandatory. Special rules adapted to fighting COVID-19 in schools would be imposed imminently, he said.

The government also reinforced rules in nightclubs, restaurants and bars, adding that masks or a negative virus test would be needed in addition to a mandatory check of full vaccination status.

"If we want to avoid another lockdown, we have to show a sense of responsibility," said De Croo.

The measures reflect similar actions taken across several European nations where the virus has raged again over the past week. The World Health Organization says Europe is the only region in the world where COVID-19 deaths are rising.



A man wears a face mask to curb the spread of coronavirus as he walks past a shop with Christmas decorations in Brussels, Belgium, Wednesday, Nov. 17, 2021. Belgium reimposed an extended use of facemasks and mandatory remote work in an attempt to contain a new surge of COVID-19 cases. Prime Minister Alexander De Croo said that the use of facemasks indoors would be lowered to the x-plus age group and that remote work would be made mandatory for all for x days in the 5-day workweek until Christmas. Credit: AP Photo/Olivier Matthys



A woman wears a face mask to protect herself against the coronavirus as she passes by an empty "Golden Key" terrace in the Marolles quarter in Brussels, Belgium, Wednesday, Nov. 17, 2021. Belgium's coronavirus consultative committee has issued new measures to combat rising coronavirus infections and deaths, reimposing an extended use of facemasks and mandatory remote work in an attempt to contain a new surge of COVID-19 cases. Credit: AP Photo/Olivier Matthys



A woman wears a face mask to protect herself against the coronavirus as she boards a public transport bus in the Marrolles quarter in Brussels, Belgium, Wednesday, Nov. 17, 2021. Belgium's coronavirus consultative committee has issued new measures to combat rising coronavirus infections and deaths, reimposing an extended use of facemasks and mandatory remote work in an attempt to contain a new surge of COVID-19 cases. Credit: AP Photo/Olivier Matthys



People wearing face masks to curb the spread of coronavirus board a bus in Brussels, Belgium, Wednesday, Nov. 17, 2021. Belgium reimposed an extended use of facemasks and mandatory remote work in an attempt to contain a new surge of COVID-19 cases. Prime Minister Alexander De Croo said that the use of facemasks indoors would be lowered to the x-plus age group and that remote work would be made mandatory for all for x days in the 5-day workweek until Christmas. Credit: AP Photo/Olivier Matthys

Coronavirus cases in Belgium, a nation of 11 million, increased 27% over the past week and reached over 10,000 a day. Hospitalizations increased 21% over the same period while the use of ICU beds shot up 28% to reach 557.

Belgium is again faced with coronavirus crisis even though 76.1% of the

population has been vaccinated, including 88% of all adults, one of the highest rates in the 27-nation EU.

De Croo said all efforts would be made now to extend a booster vaccination campaign to the full population after it had been limited so far to [vulnerable groups](#) and medical workers.

To improve its vaccination drive, the government decided earlier this week to make vaccinations mandatory for health care workers as of next April.

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