

# Swiss cases hit 2021 high but no new COVID rules

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Switzerland's health minister on Thursday insisted new COVID-19 restrictions were not necessary despite daily new cases quadrupling in a month to an all-year high.

"We are clearly facing the fifth wave," Alain Berset told a news conference, adding that the course of the pandemic "will depend on the behaviour of all of us".

Though the virus is spreading particularly among [younger people](#) less likely to suffer [severe illness](#) from the disease, Berset said the surge in cases was more worrying as "the number of adults who have no immunity is too big".

A vaccination drive last week lifted the sluggish jab uptake of recent months and ministers hope the increased pace can be sustained.

Switzerland had 10 percent of the population fully vaccinated by April 23, racing to 50 percent three months later on July 29. But in the subsequent months that progress has tailed off drastically.

Around 65 percent of the Swiss population are now fully vaccinated, while a further two percent have had the first dose of a two-jab course.

With case rates having shot up since mid-October, the Swiss authorities fear an overload of hospital cases as the winter kicks in.

Last week, COVID-19 hospitalisations increased by a quarter, while deaths were up more than 80 percent to 53 fatalities.

Intensive care units are 77 percent full, with 17 percent of the overall capacity taken up by COVID-19 patients.

## **'Danger zone'**

Bern University epidemiologist Christian Althaus called for a return to working from home, free tests and greater mask-wearing indoors, given the surge in cases.

Any restrictions on the freedoms of vaccinated people must be justified, he told the Neue Zürcher Zeitung newspaper, adding: "We must not let unvaccinated people take society hostage."

Althaus said that given the creeping vaccination rate—neighbours Germany, France and Italy all have higher rates—Switzerland could be in for a rough winter.

"We are not out of the [danger zone](#) yet. Given the current situation, we could find ourselves once again in a critical situation by Christmas," he said.

As part of its famous direct democracy system, Switzerland will vote on November 28 on its COVID-19 laws, including the COVID certificate for fully vaccinated, recovered or tested-negative people.

The pass facilitates international travel and entry to public events and indoor spaces such as restaurants and concert venues.

The landlocked European country, population 8.6 million, has recorded nearly 931,000 positive tests—with nearly 6,000 more added on Thursday—and 10,926 deaths during the pandemic.

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