

Vaccine champion Spain spared European virus surge

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Around 79 percent of Spain's entire population is fully vaccinated, compared to just 67 percent in Britain and Germany.

With the highest COVID-19 vaccination rate of Europe's big nations, Spain has been spared the surge in infections seen across the continent

but experts warn the country remains vulnerable to the virus.

Spain, one of the nations hit earliest and hardest by the pandemic, now has one of the lowest [infection](#) rates in Europe—just 63 cases per 100,000 people reported in the past 14 days.

The rate is twice as high in Italy, about six times higher in Germany and Poland and 12 times higher in Britain, according to an AFP tally based on official figures.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said Wednesday the evolution of the pandemic in Spain was "positive", adding "we have more than enough reasons to feel proud of what we have achieved".

Around 79 percent of Spain's entire population is fully vaccinated, compared to just 67 percent in Britain and Germany.

While the vaccination rate is only several percentage points higher than France's and Italy's, Spain has a much higher percentage of vulnerable, elderly people who have received the jab.

Over 99 percent of those over the age of 70 are fully vaccinated in Spain.

The lack of vaccine hesitancy, combined with an inoculation programme that worked through age groups, beginning with the oldest, yielded good results, Inaki Comas, a researcher at the Biomedicine Institute of Valencia, told AFP.

Mild climate

Spain's milder climate has also helped to prevent the spread of the virus as it favours outdoor gatherings on patios instead of indoors, he added.

And while limits on the size of social gatherings were scrapped in Spain over a month ago and nightlife allowed to fully re-start, [face masks](#) are still required indoors in public spaces.

But experts warn the arrival of colder weather, the fact the protection provided by COVID vaccines appears to wane over time and the risk posed from new variants means infections will likely rise.

"These three factors are a very good breeding ground for the coronavirus," said Comas, adding Spain was "entering a very critical moment".

Cesar Carballo, a doctor in the emergency unit of the Ramon y Cajal hospital in Madrid, agreed, saying infection rates will start to rise in Spain as colder weather causes social life to move indoors.

"We know how the virus is transmitted and when the cold comes and the evenings are darker we will tend to go indoors and the virus spreads there," he said.

'Good position'

While Spain has a high immunisation rate, epidemiologists now suggest that it is unrealistic that herd immunity can be reached solely with the use of existing vaccines since they don't fully suppress infections.

"Spain is in a good position now but it does not mean that it has already reached a point where it will not go back," Salvador Macip, an expert in [health sciences](#) at Catalonia's Open University who has written a book called "The Great Modern Plagues", told AFP.

"Once you get to the point where the levels of infections are very low, the only way to go is up."

The University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) predicts Spain will see a rise in infections during the second half of November which will soar in December before peaking at the end of the year.

"Infection rates may be high but if people are vaccinated and do not get seriously sick, it is not a problem," said Comas.

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