

# Belgium to tighten COVID rules to counter rise of omicron

December 22 2021, by Raf Casert

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Two people walk by a Christmas projection on the Steen Castle in the historical center of Antwerp, Belgium, Monday, Dec. 20, 2021. Nations across Europe have moved to reimpose tougher measures to stem a new wave of COVID-19 infections spurred by the highly transmissible omicron variant, with the Netherlands leading the way by imposing a nationwide lockdown. Neighbouring Belgium will hold its government meeting on Wednesday to decide if new measures will be taken. Credit: AP Photo/Virginia Mayo

Belgium will further tighten coronavirus restrictions because of the surging omicron variant, authorities announced Wednesday, but the country shied away from a full lockdown like in the neighboring Netherlands.

Cinemas, theaters and [concert halls](#) will be closed and indoor activities banned in Belgium. Sports fans won't be allowed into stadiums and indoor venues. Shopping will be curtailed with visitors spread out and groups entering a shop limited to two adults, possibly accompanied by children.

Bars and restaurants will be allowed to remain open until 11 p.m. but under limits. And families were advised to keep visitors to a minimum for Christmas but did not face exact limits.

The measures will take effect Sunday. Prime Minister Alexander De Croo said "there is reason for concern. We are facing omicron."

He added that "what we know about it is bad news," referring to omicron's high transmissibility.

"It is a tough package," virologist Marc Van Ranst said.

But much about the omicron variant remains unknown, including whether it causes more or less [severe illness](#).

The Belgian measures came despite a strong and steady decline in new COVID-19 cases and hospital admissions. The government said, however, that the lightning fast transmission of omicron made it necessary to take action earlier rather than later.



People walk next to a Christmas tree and other decorations in the historical center of Antwerp, Belgium, Monday, Dec. 20, 2021. Nations across Europe have moved to reimpose tougher measures to stem a new wave of COVID-19 infections spurred by the highly transmissible omicron variant, with the Netherlands leading the way by imposing a nationwide lockdown. Neighbouring Belgium will hold its government meeting on Wednesday to decide if new measures will be taken. Credit: AP Photo/Virginia Mayo

"It will be dominant soon," said De Croo. "We have to be more careful that ever."

Emmanuel Andre, who heads Belgium's COVID-19 reference lab, said [omicron](#) represented 27% of new cases, doubling in as many days.



Since last weekend, Belgium's northern neighbor, The Netherlands, has closed all nonessential stores, bars and restaurants until Jan. 14 and shut schools and universities until Jan. 9.



People enjoy fire pits and a smoking cauldron among Christmas decorations in the historical center of Antwerp, Belgium, Monday, Dec. 20, 2021. Nations across Europe have moved to reimpose tougher measures to stem a new wave of COVID-19 infections spurred by the highly transmissible omicron variant, with the Netherlands leading the way by imposing a nationwide lockdown. Neighbouring Belgium will hold its government meeting on Wednesday to decide if new measures will be taken. Credit: AP Photo/Virginia Mayo

Belgium's major carnival, in Aalst, was canceled even if the festival drawing tens of thousands of visitors each year was slated for late February.

Belgium's daily new COVID-19 cases have declined 36% over the week ending Sunday, to reach about 8,300 in the nation of 11 million. Hospital admissions have declined 34% to reach 173 a day.

The number of COVID-19 dead has surpassed 28,000.

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