

# France seeks to avoid a lockdown with tougher vaccine rules

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People wearing face masks to protect against COVID-19 walk past the Eiffel Tower in Paris, Tuesday, Dec. 21, 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. Credit: AP Photo/Michel Euler

Facing a jump in COVID-19 hospitalizations, France's government is

trying to push through a law requiring vaccination to enter any restaurant and many other public places, and warning of tougher measures if the current surge of infections doesn't recede.

The government on Tuesday dropped efforts to require a health pass for all workplaces, however, amid opposition from unions and employers..

French Prime Minister Jean Castex spent the day Tuesday meeting with French mayors and lawmakers to persuade them to support tougher vaccine rules.

French travelers and families, meanwhile, were flocking to virus testing tents ahead of the holidays.

France's virus hospitalization numbers have shot up in recent weeks, with some 16,000 people currently hospitalized with COVID-19 and 60% of the country's ICU beds occupied by virus patients, according to the state health agency. Confirmed weekly virus infections are at the highest level in France since the pandemic began.

Most are infected with the [delta variant](#), but more than one in three new cases in the Paris region is the fast-spreading omicron variant, French government spokesman Gabriel Attal said.

"We don't have a second to lose," he told reporters. "The situation in the hospitals is tense."

The French [government](#) wants a law passed by Jan. 15 requiring vaccination to enter restaurants and many public venues, he said. Currently a "health pass" is required to enter all such spaces in France, but people can get the pass with either a vaccination certificate, a negative [virus](#) test or proof of recent recovery from COVID-19.



A medical staff takes the temperature to a child in a vaccine center in Sélestat, eastern France, Tuesday, Dec. 21, 2021. France's government is stepping up vaccination efforts amid fast-growing infections by the omicron variant, notably opening up injections to children under 12 for the first time. Vaccinations of children age 5 to 11 with medical conditions started earlier this month in France, and the government expects to expand that to all children in this age group starting this week. Credit: AP Photo/Jean-Francois Badias



People take the sun in the Luxembourg garden next to the French Senat, in Paris, France, Tuesday, Dec. 21, 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. Credit: AP Photo/Francois Mori



People wearing face masks to protect against COVID-19 stroll along a Chanel boutique in Paris, Tuesday, Dec. 21, 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. Credit: AP Photo/Michel Euler



People take the sun in the Luxembourg garden next to the French Senat, in Paris, France, Tuesday, Dec. 21, 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. Credit: AP Photo/Francois Mori



A medical technician administers nasal swabs at a mobile testing site begin a plastic window at the Champs Elysees avenue in Paris, Tuesday, Dec. 21, 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. Credit: AP Photo/Michel Euler

France also is ramping up vaccination and booster efforts, with doses made available to all children 5-11 starting Wednesday. More than 89% of French people 12 and over have had at least two [vaccine](#) shots, and about 40% of adults have had three doses, Attal said.

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