

France to shut nightclubs over COVID surge

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Nightclubs in France will be ordered to close for four weeks from this weekend to counter a COVID surge that has put hospitals under severe strain, the prime minister said Monday.

Schoolchildren will also face stricter [social distancing](#) and extended use

of face masks, with infection rates climbing among [young people](#), said Jean Castex, who emerged from quarantine last week after contracting the virus.

"We have all had a tendency to lower our guard" in recent weeks, he said.

But the government stopped short of imposing stricter measures for the [general population](#) or targeting the non-vaccinated, as several other countries have done in recent days.

Instead, Castex said employers should encourage staff to work from home and urged people to ease off social engagements such as office parties as the year-end holidays approach.

And health passes will now be required for eating venues in outdoor Christmas markets, he said.

"The situation demands an individual as well as a collective effort," Castex said in a televised address.

"But it's no longer the time for lockdowns," he said, citing a French vaccination rate of nearly 90 percent of the eligible population.

Vaccinations could also be extended to children aged 5 to 12, he said, and the over-65s will no longer need appointments to get booster shots.

'Dancing in the restaurants'

Several new vaccination centres will be opened in Paris over the coming days as current sites struggle to meet demand across major cities—some 10 million people already having received booster shots.

Nightclub owners reacted furiously to the new shutdown, having already been closed for most of last winter and spring before reopening in July.

Thierry Fontaine of the UMIH Nuit industry association said clubs were being unfairly targeted.

"Once again there's no clampdown for any other sector," he said.

"They cancel New Year's Eve for us... but they'll be dancing in all the restaurants."

He also doubted that financial aid promised by Castex would be enough to compensate for losing out on the key holiday season.

Nearly all of the analysed virus cases in France involve the Delta variant, which has proved more infectious even among vaccinated people.

So far France has confirmed only 25 cases of the new Omicron variant but officials say the number could jump significantly in the coming weeks.

On Sunday, the health ministry reported more than 42,000 cases in the previous 24 hours, and more than 11,000 patients in hospital—the highest number since August—with 2,000 in intensive care.

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