

France makes vaccination push as omicron's domination looms

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French Health Minister Olivier Veran said Wednesday that omicron infections are spreading fast and that the coronavirus variant will become the dominant infection in the last days of 2021.

Speaking to BFMTV, Veran ruled out additional restrictions on public life and said the government's main effort to stop the spread of the virus is a robust vaccination campaign, including vaccination of children aged 5-11 that started on Wednesday.

"It's time to start vaccinating children," Veran told the morning news program on BFMTV after 350 vaccination centers opened around the country to start administering shots to [young children](#). Children need the consent of one parent to be vaccinated, and one parent has to be present when they get a shot.

More than a thousand in every 100,000 children aged 6-10 are infected with coronavirus, according to government figures that were last updated Dec. 6.

Currently, 145 children are hospitalized in France for severe illness due to COVID-19 and 27 children are receiving medical treatment in intensive care units, the health minister said. He did not give the ages of the [children](#).

Among the [general population](#), the "very contagious" virus is spreading fast, Veran said, warning that the omicron variant could start dominating infections as early as next week.

In the past 24 hours, France registered 72,832 new cases. Omicron amounts for 20% of all registered cases, the health minister said. France currently has 16,000 people hospitalized with COVID-19 and 60% of the country's ICU beds are occupied by virus patients.

As infections soar, the government is trying to push through a law requiring vaccination to enter any restaurant and many other public places. The health minister said on Wednesday that authorities are considering enforcing identity card checks along with the [vaccine](#) passes

because of large number of forged health passes—over 100,000, according to media reports—discovered over the past weeks.

The French government wants a law passed by Jan. 15 requiring vaccination to enter restaurants and many public venues. 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.

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

In a [radio interview](#) on Wednesday, Labor Minister Elisabeth Borne asked companies and businesses to enable employees to work remotely wherever possible for at least three if not four days a week.

Ahead of the holiday season, France has shut down nightclubs and banned New Year's Eve fireworks and other mass end-of-year celebrations, including concerts.

"It's an evening sacrificed for a good cause," the [health minister](#) said.

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