

SKorea sets new virus record as officials plan restrictions

December 15 2021



A medical workers passes by people as they wait for the coronavirus testing outside a public health center in Seoul, South Korea, Wednesday, Dec. 15, 2021. Halting its steps toward normalcy, South Korea will clamp down on social gatherings and cut the hours of some businesses to fight a record-breaking surge of the coronavirus that has led to a spike in hospitalizations and deaths. (AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon).

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Prime Minister Kim Boo-kyum confirmed the government's intent to restore stricter social distancing measures during a virus meeting on Wednesday as the country set another new one-day record in infections with 7,850 cases, the fourth time this month the daily tally exceeded 7,000.

The country's [death toll](#) is now 4,456 after 70 virus patients died in the past 24 hours, while a record 964 patients were in critical or serious condition. Officials previously said the country's medical system could buckle if the number of serious cases topped 1,000 because it would greatly hamper hospitals' ability to respond not only to COVID-19 but also to other medical conditions.

"The government sees the current virus situation as serious and plans to enforce stronger social distancing measures," said Kim, Seoul's No. 2 behind President Moon Jae-in. "We are considering measures that include further reducing the size of allowable social gatherings and imposing business-hour restrictions, and these steps will be confirmed and announced soon."



People wait for the coronavirus testing outside a public health center in Seoul, South Korea, Wednesday, Dec. 15, 2021. Halting its steps toward normalcy, South Korea will clamp down on social gatherings and cut the hours of some businesses to fight a record-breaking surge of the coronavirus that has led to a spike in hospitalizations and deaths. (AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon).



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Some expect the new measures could be announced as early as Friday.

The virus surge has been a rude awakening for South Korea, which significantly eased social distancing rules and fully reopened schools in November in what officials had described as a first step toward restoring pre-pandemic normalcy.

In allowing larger social gatherings and lifting limits on indoor dining

hours, officials had hoped that improving vaccination rates would suppress hospitalizations and deaths even if the virus continues to spread.

However, there has been a surge in serious cases among people in their 60s or older, including those whose immunities have waned after being inoculated early in the vaccine rollout that began in February.

Officials had moderately sharpened social distancing rules last week, banning private gatherings of seven or more people in the capital Seoul and nearby metropolitan regions and requiring adults to verify their vaccination status to use restaurants and other indoor venues. Kim acknowledged that such measures have not been meaningfully effective in slowing the [virus](#).

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Citation: SKorea sets new virus record as officials plan restrictions (2021, December 15)
retrieved 27 April 2024 from
<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-12-skorea-virus-restrictions.html>

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