

Sweden expands vaccine passes, tightens restrictions on virus surge

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Sweden on Tuesday announced a slew of measures, including an expanded use of vaccine certificates, aimed at countering the spread of COVID-19 as cases mount, the government said.

As of December 23, those able to were urged to return to working from home, public events with between 20 and 500 attendants would need to have the audience seated and events with a larger audience will need to require proof of vaccinations.

"We now need to take joint responsibility and adapt to the reality at hand," Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson told a press conference.

In addition, measures to avoid crowding in shopping centres and bars and restaurants are only allowed to offer seated service with patrons sitting at least a metre apart.

"In practice that means that there unfortunately won't be any partying at night clubs on New Year's Eve."

A cap on the number of people allowed in locations used for private parties would also be introduced and was set at 50, as well as some curbs targeting

Noting that Sweden still was seeing relatively low levels of COVID-19, director of the country's Public Health Agency, Karin Tegmark Wisell, said that the strain on Sweden's healthcare had increased as a result of the novel coronavirus coupled with other viruses and the seasonal flu.

"We're still seeing a considerable spread in Europe and our neighbouring countries. We have lower levels in Sweden but in the last few weeks we have also here seen a rapid increase in the rate of the spread, Tegmark Wisell said, adding that the number of new cases was expected to rise and that the situation was "ominous."

The [health](#) agency had also issued an official request to the government to require a negative test no older than 48 hours for foreign citizens entering Sweden no matter their vaccination status, which Andersson

said would be "handled speedily."

Most of the measures were announced without an end date, but health minister Lena Hallengren told reporters that they did not wish to keep them "longer than necessary."

The health agency director also noted that nearly 1.5 million Swedes were still not vaccinated.

The country of 10.3 million people is still seeing some of the lowest levels of new cases in Europe, according to the WHO, but it has seen an increase of 37 percent in the 14-day incidence rate, compared to the preceding period.

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