Cyprus mulls new COVID measures as per capita rate tops world

January 4 2022

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Cypriot authorities were meeting Tuesday to consider new restrictions to rein in a detected COVID infection rate that is now the highest in the world per capita.

Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades was to meet with scientific

advisers to discuss measures that could include a delayed start to the new school term and restrictions on church gatherings as the island prepares to mark Epiphany, a key date in the Greek Orthodox religious calendar, on Thursday.

Like other European countries, the Mediterranean island has been hit by a surge in cases of the highly contagious Omicron variant of the coronavirus.

On Tuesday, the Republic of Cyprus registered a new record of 5,457 cases in a population of around one million, surpassing the New Year's Eve spike of 5,048, which topped five consecutive daily record highs.

According to AFP figures prior to the release of Tuesday's data, Cyprus recorded the world's highest detected COVID infection rate per 100,000 inhabitants over the past seven days.

It was top with 2,505 cases per 100,000 inhabitants, followed by Denmark (2,117), Ireland (1,946), Greece (1,762) and France (1,680).

The cabinet is expected to announce any new measures on Wednesday.

Further restrictions could be imposed on nightclubs and entertainment venues as well as home visits.

So far, the government has been reluctant to contemplate a fourth national lockdown.

But on Tuesday, Cyprus tightened entry requirements at its airports in a new blow for its tourism dependent economy.

Everyone arriving in the Republic of Cyprus must present a negative PCR test carried out no more than 48 hours before departure.

Passengers are already required to undergo a PCR test at the airport on arrival, at their own expense.

Companies are required to ensure 40 percent of their staff work remotely while venues can only have seated customers and no dancing.

Access to nightclubs, venues and wedding receptions requires vaccinated patrons to present a negative COVID-19 test carried out within 24 hours, though those with a booster shot are exempt.

All hospital visits have been banned, and sports stadiums are restricted to 50 percent capacity, down from 75 percent.

Last week, Health Minister Michalis Hadjipantelas told reporters that Omicron was now the dominant strain in the community, accounting for 80 percent of cases.

The Republic of Cyprus has officially registered 183,178 coronavirus cases and 646 deaths since the start of the pandemic in 2020, including five fatalities announced on Tuesday.

Mask-wearing is mandatory for everyone aged six and over in public areas, both outdoor and indoor.

Double-vaccinated employees must undergo weekly tests, and unvaccinated individuals are banned from hospitality venues and nightclubs.

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Citation: Cyprus mulls new COVID measures as per capita rate tops world (2022, January 4) retrieved 6 May 2024 from https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-01-cyprus-mulls-covid-capita-tops.html

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