

# Dutch government eases lockdown despite soaring infections

January 25 2022, by Mike Corder

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A lone girl waits for a tram in a near-deserted street full of closed restaurants, bars and shop under a partial lockdown in Amsterdam, Netherlands, Friday, Nov. 26, 2021. The new Dutch government was meeting Thursday, Jan. 13, 2022, to discuss whether to extend or ease its coronavirus lockdown amid growing anger and plans for civil disobedience from businesses that have been shuttered for weeks. Credit: AP Photo/Peter Dejong, File

Prime Minister Mark Rutte further eased the Netherlands' coronavirus lockdown, allowing bars, restaurants, museums, theaters and other venues to reopen from Wednesday for the first time this year.

But Rutte warned that the move wasn't without risks.

"We are taking a big step today to unlock the Netherlands while the infections numbers are really going through the roof," Rutte said Tuesday.

The announcement wasn't all good news for the beleaguered hospitality and cultural sectors, with the opening hours limited to 10 p.m., while professional sports teams will only be allowed to fill stadiums to a third of their normal capacities.

Soccer clubs and administrators protested the move even before it was officially announced, calling it in a joint statement "a proposal without perspective."

The relaxation of restrictions follows widespread protests in recent weeks by [business owners](#) ranging from the Van Gogh Museum to local cafes at being excluded from an earlier easing of pandemic restrictions.

Infections have spiked in recent weeks because of the omicron variant, despite the lockdown that was tougher than in most of Europe, but admissions to the country's intensive care units have been declining. The national public health institute reported a 51% rise in new COVID-19 cases over the last week to more than 366,000, while ICU admissions dropped by 34%.

"We are taking another risk," Health Minister Ernst Kuipers said. "We are doing that for good reason. Living longer with many restrictive measures damages our health and our society."

Omicron is less likely to cause severe illness than the previous delta variant, according to studies. Omicron spreads even more easily than other coronavirus strains, and has already become dominant in many countries. It also more easily infects those who have been vaccinated or had previously been infected by prior versions of the virus.

The Dutch government sought to mitigate the risk by imposing restrictions on venues where people gather, including the use of coronavirus passports and social distancing and capping the number of people allowed indoors and in stadiums.

The new measures apply for six weeks, but Rutte said the government would review them and their effect on infection numbers after three weeks.

He urged the public to stick to the rules, saying: "It is now up to us all to ensure that we don't have to hit the brakes again then."

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