France hits staggering new case record, Europe's highest

January 5 2022

A man gets a nasal swap at a mobile COVID-19 testing site at the Champs Elysees avenue in Paris, Wednesday, Jan. 5, 2022. France is allowing health workers who are infected with the coronavirus but have few or no symptoms to keep treating patients rather than self-isolate, an extraordinary stop-gap measure aimed at alleviating staff shortages at hospitals and other medical facilities caused by an unprecedented explosion in infections. The Arc de Triomphe in the background. Credit: AP Photo/Michel Euler

France announced a staggering 332,252 daily virus cases Wednesday, smashing a string of recent records, as hospitals prepared drastic measures to brace for patient surges and the government strained to avoid a new lockdown.

With Europe's highest-ever single-day confirmed infection count, France is facing an omicron-driven surge that is dominating the race for April's presidential election and increasingly disrupting workplaces, schools and public life.

But the country also has one of the world's most-vaccinated populations, so the government is hoping the sweeping infections won't hit hospitals as badly as at the start of the pandemic, and is pushing the small minority of unvaccinated people to get inoculated fast.

France's weekly average of virus cases has doubled in the past 10 days, with more than 1,800 people out of 100,000 testing positive over the past week, according to the government health agency.

The number of virus patients in hospitals has been on an upward trajectory for two months, and more than 72% of French ICU beds are now occupied by people with COVID-19.

The surge has prompted authorities to allow health care workers who are infected with the coronavirus to keep treating patients rather than self-isolate, to ease staff shortages at medical facilities.

A Parisian woman gets a nasal swap at a mobile COVID-19 testing site, in Paris, France, Wednesday, Jan. 5, 2022. France is allowing health workers who are infected with the coronavirus but have few or no symptoms to keep treating patients rather than self-isolate, an extraordinary stop-gap measure aimed at alleviating staff shortages at hospitals and other medical facilities caused by an unprecedented explosion in infections. Credit: AP Photo/Francois Mori

People wearing face masks to protect against COVID-19 walk along the Champs Elysees avenue in Paris, Wednesday, Jan. 5, 2022. France is allowing health workers who are infected with the coronavirus but have few or no symptoms to keep treating patients rather than self-isolate, an extraordinary stop-gap measure aimed at alleviating staff shortages at hospitals and other medical facilities caused by an unprecedented explosion in infections. Credit: AP Photo/Michel Euler

Meanwhile parliament is debating a bill that would deny unvaccinated people access to restaurants, regional trains and planes and many other public places. Health officials say it's needed to save lives and protect hospitals. French President Emmanuel Macron heightened tensions with an explosive remark that prompted widespread criticism and was seen as a campaign ploy.

The vaccine push has also prompted tensions in France's overseas territories. Dozens of anti-vaccination protesters in the French Caribbean island of Guadeloupe attacked a [hospital](#) director and other medical staff following recent violent demonstrations against COVID-19 restrictions and long-running grievances.

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