

Czechs ditch COVID-19 pass rules, ease limits on crowds

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People wearing face masks walk across the medieval Charles Bridge in Prague, Czech Republic, on Feb. 25, 2021. The Czech Republic's government has moved forward with easing coronavirus restrictions, cancelling a requirement for people to present a certificate proving they have been vaccinated or recovered from COVID-19 to be eligible to use various services and attend public events. People will no longer have to do it at bars, restaurants, cafes, hairdressers and others as well at sports and cultural events as of Thursday, Feb. 10, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Petr David Josek, File

The Czech Republic moved forward with easing coronavirus restrictions on Wednesday, cancelling a requirement for people to present a certificate proving they have been vaccinated or recovered from COVID-19 to use services and attend public events.

Beginning Thursday, people will no longer need a COVID-19 health pass to enter bars, restaurants, cafes and hairdressers as well as sports and cultural events.

At the same time, Prime Minister Petr Fiala said his government will lift more coronavirus measures later this month, depending on the development of the pandemic.

"An absolute majority of coronavirus restrictions will be lifted by March 1," Fiala said.

Health Minister Vlastimil Valek said starting Feb 19, up to 5,000 people will be allowed to attend concerts, sports competitions and other events where the visitors are seated, up from the current 1,000. For other gatherings, the limit will increase from 100 to 500.

The government had previously decided to end mandatory coronavirus testing at schools and companies.

The Czech Republic hit a record 57,195 daily new cases on Feb 1 amid a surge caused by the highly transmittable omicron variant. It dropped to 37,627 on Tuesday, still the seventh-highest daily increase since the beginning of the pandemic.

The seven-day infection rate dropped to 1,962 per 100,000 residents on Tuesday from to 2,483 a week ago.

The number of COVID-19 patients needing hospitalization has increased by 2,000 since Jan 22, reaching 3,553. But only slightly more than 200 people have been in intensive care units, a stable number for more than two weeks.

The European Union nation of 10.5 million has over 6.8 million people fully vaccinated and almost 3.9 million who have received a booster shot. Overall, the Czech Republic has registered 37,612 virus-related deaths.

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