India's Chennai city to reimpose lockdown as coronavirus surges

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A lockdown will be reimposed Friday on some 15 million people in the Indian city of Chennai and several neighbouring districts, state officials said, as coronavirus cases surge in the region.

"Full Lockdown from 19th for Chennai, Thiruvallur, Chengalpet & Kanchipuram districts," the Tamil Nadu state government tweeted Monday.

It will be in place until the end of June.

India, home to 1.3 billion people, has gradually lifted a nationwide lockdown over the past few weeks even as new infections continue rising.

Tamil Nadu, where Chennai is the capital, is the second-worst hit state after Maharashtra.

The southern state has recorded just over 44,000 cases out of a nationwide total of 332,424, according to official figures.

A majority of the cases are in Chennai, according to media reports.

Shops selling essential items and restaurants will be allowed to remain open from early morning until 2:00 pm local time during the lockdown.

The decision was taken after recommendations from an expert panel on how to curb the spread of the infectious disease.

The state government also ordered an audit of the number of recorded deaths after media reports said at least 200 fatalities were not reflected in the official toll of 435.

The renewed restrictions came as questions grew about why India's initial lockdown, imposed from late March, did not stem the rise in cases, with new daily highs being recorded regularly.

There have been reports of patients struggling to find hospital beds in

other major cities such as the capital New Delhi and the financial hub Mumbai, which is the capital of Maharashtra.

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