

Belgium imposes 'more severe' lockdown rules

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Belgium, the country with by some measures the world's worst coronavirus outbreak, will impose tighter lockdown rules from Monday, closing non-essential businesses and restricting household visits.

"These are last-chance measures if we want to get the figures down,"

said Prime Minister Alexander de Croo, warning that the new rules would stay in place for at least a month and a half.

Households will only be allowed to receive one visitor, half-term holidays for schools will be extended to November 15 and those who can adapt their jobs to work from home will be asked to do so.

"It's a [lockdown](#), but a lockdown that allows factories to operate, that will allow schools to open cautiously, and that will not plunge people into isolation," said health minister Frank Vandenbroucke.

Belgium, with 11.5 million inhabitants, has the most COVID-19 cases per capita in the world and has as many [hospital](#) cases now as at the peak of the pandemic's first wave in April.

There were 6,187 patients in hospital on Friday, 1,057 of them in [intensive care](#). Over the last week Belgium has recorded more than 100,000 new infections—more than 15,000 per day on average—a record.

"Our country is in a state of health emergency. The pressure in the hospitals is immense and the [medical staff](#) are making superhuman efforts to save lives every day," De Croo said.

"By mid-November, there will be 2,800 people in intensive care," he warned.

Belgium has begun shifting small numbers of intensive care patients to neighbouring EU countries, but all of Europe is now facing a second wave of the disease and hospital bed space is running out

In mid-October a curfew was imposed between midnight and 5:00 am, and cafes and restaurants had been ordered to close.

But in recent days the country has been divided over how to deal with the crisis.

Last Friday, even as experts were calling for the "electroshock" of a total lockdown, De Croo announced new restrictions limited to sports and recreation—leaving shops and schools open.

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