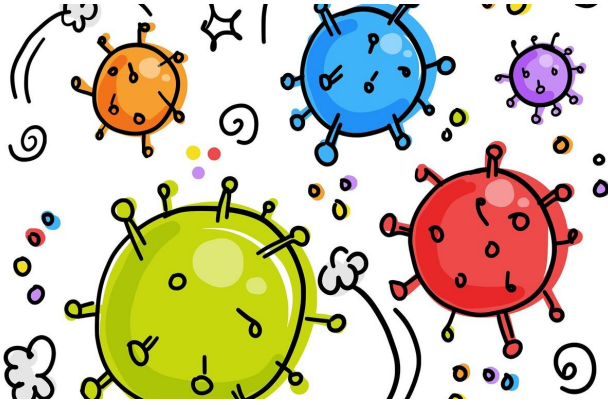


Dutch parliament backs coronavirus curfew

21 January 2021



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The Dutch parliament approved Prime Minister Mark Rutte's plan for a coronavirus curfew, with the government saying it will begin on Saturday.

MPs on Thursday backed the curfew on condition that it start half an hour later than originally intended, meaning it will now run from 9 pm until 4:30 am.

The move had earlier faced some criticism led by far-right politician Geert Wilders, but was in the end approved by Rutte's coalition and a number of opposition parties.

Rutte had earlier urged lawmakers to back the country's first curfew since World War II, saying it is was needed to bring COVID-19 case numbers down.

He said the curfew "exactly has to do ... with the British variant and the big, big worries that we all have", referring to a new, more infectious strain of the disease that first emerged in the UK.

"We really see it now, in combination with a still high number of infections due to the existing virus. We want to push these cases further back," said Rutte, who leads the liberal VVD party.

Wilders, head of the anti-Islam PVV party, said however that the curfew plan was "careless" and "disproportionate".

"I stand here for freedom. I lost it myself," said Wilders, who has for years been under round-the-clock security after receiving death threats.

"I do not accept that we unnecessarily... introduce curfews while there are alternatives."

The curfew is set to last until at least February 19. Violators face a 95-euro (\$115) fine.

A justice ministry spokesman confirmed to AFP that the curfew would start on Saturday.

Rutte and his cabinet resigned on Friday over a scandal involving child tax benefits, but they will continue to govern until elections in mid-March.

The Netherlands is already under its toughest measures since the start of the pandemic, with bars and restaurants having closed in October, and schools and non-essential shops shut since December.

Rutte also announced on Wednesday a ban on flights from Britain, South Africa and South America, and for a cut in the number of guests allowed in people's homes to one, from the current number of two.

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