

Hard-hit Portugal sees drop in virus infections

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Portugal, hit by the world's highest per capita COVID-19 death rates and infections in recent weeks, is now seeing a decline in cases, the health minister said Thursday.

"Currently, the incidence of new COVID-19 cases is starting to decrease in Portugal," minister Marta Temido said.

Speaking to a committee of the European Parliament in Brussels, she cited a decrease in the average over the last two weeks.

"We nevertheless have difficult weeks ahead of us," she added.

According to data compiled by AFP, Portugal over recent weeks has recorded the largest number of infections and deaths relative to its population of any country in the world. A number of its hospitals are overflowing with COVID patients.

Under health ministry figures given to AFP, [intensive care](#) units set aside for COVID patients hit 90.3 percent occupancy nationwide on Wednesday.

The health ministry said Thursday that in 24 hours Portugal, a country of 10 million people, recorded 225 new deaths, or the lowest toll for two weeks.

With nearly 8,000 new cases in 24 hours, the rate of new infections was trending lower after a record of nearly 16,500 infections reached January 28.

The number of people hospitalised also declined between Wednesday and Thursday to 6,496 patients, including 863 in intensive care.

Though Portugal has seen the highest per capita COVID death and [infection](#) rates in recent weeks, it ranks seventh in the world for infections per capita since the pandemic began about a year ago and is lower down the list for deaths per capita over the last year.

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