Medical Xpress

Czechs running out of hospital capacity as virus soars

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The Czech Republic is reaching capacity in intensive care wards as coronavirus infections keep soaring in the EU's worst-hit country, the health ministry said Tuesday.

The country tops the world in terms of new infections per 100,000 people over the last 14 days and is second after neighbouring Slovakia for deaths, according to an AFP tally.

The government, which tamed the spread during the first wave early last year, has been grappling with recurrent upswings since the summer of 2020 in the country of 10.7 million people.

"We're getting close to running out of intensive care capacity," Deputy Health Minister Vladimir Cerny told reporters, blaming a lack of qualified staff in the first place.

"In no way can we maintain the current standards of health care and there is a slowdown and postponements in non-COVID care. The system as a whole is close to its limit," he added.

On Tuesday, the Czech Republic registered more than 1,300 patients in intensive care, including 660 on ventilators and "a higher number" on life support, said Cerny.

The EU member state has registered over 1.16 million cases and more than 19,500 deaths since the pandemic began.

Cerny said the government should now formally ask neighbouring Germany to accept patients mainly from hard-hit western Czech regions.

Two weeks ago, Health Minister Jan Blatny reaped criticism for turning down an offer from Germany to help relieve an overburdened hospital in the westernmost city of Cheb.

Cerny said the government was not planning to use a field hospital in the second city of Brno. Another field hospital in Prague has been dismantled after never being used.

To step up its measures, the government has ordered people to wear FFP2 face masks or better—or two ordinary face masks—in public buildings, shops and at public transport stops from next Thursday.

It shuttered three districts reporting a rapid spread earlier this month.

Restaurants, cinemas, theatres and most shops remain closed, as do schools, with the exception of kindergartens and the first two years of elementary school.

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