

Vietnam puts southern region in lockdown as surge grows

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A delivery man rides a scooter on a quiet street in Vung Tau, Vietnam, Sunday, July 18, 2021. Vietnam has put its entire southern region in a two-week lockdown starting midnight Sunday, as confirmed daily COVID-19 cases exceeded 3,000 for the third day in a row. Credit: AP Photo/Hau Dinh

Vietnam put its entire southern region in a two-week lockdown starting midnight Sunday, as confirmed COVID-19 cases exceeded 3,000 for the third day in a row.

The [lockdown](#) order includes the Mekong Delta and Ho Chi Minh City metropolis, the country's financial and economic hub with over 35 million people—nearly a third of Vietnam's population.

Officials say they have to act as the number of infections reached nearly 50,000 since the outbreak reemerged at the end of April after several months of no cases being recorded. Most of the 225 COVID-19 dead—190 of them—have occurred since April.

Ho Chi Minh City, the epicenter of the surge, had already announced a full lockdown a week ago, after dozens of cases were reported in late May.

The city now accounts for most of the cases in the country with over 2,000 daily.

"The situation is getting serious with a high rate of transmission, especially with the dangerous delta variant. We have to put the health and safety of the people as top priority," Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh was quoted as saying in announcing the restrictions.

The government order bans all gatherings of more than two people in [public places](#) except for government offices, hospitals and a handful of essential businesses. People are requested to only leave home to buy necessities such as food, medicine, or for vital matters.

Deputy Prime Minister Vu Duc Dam, head of the country's committee for COVID-19 pandemic prevention, said the lockdown order must be applied strictly since the latest wave has spread to 57 of the country's 63 municipalities and provinces while the [vaccine supply](#) is still limited.

"We have to keep the transmission rate at the lowest possible to ensure the health system functions effectively and is not being overloaded," Dam said.

According to the Ministry of Health, Vietnam has received only about 6 million of the 124 million doses of vaccine it had secured through the U.N.-backed COVAX facility and in direct orders with vaccine manufactures.

Over 4 million people have received at least one dose. Vietnam aims to inoculate at least 70% of the population by the end of the year.

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