

Israel tightens coronavirus restrictions as new cases surge

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A man receives a third Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine from medical staff at a coronavirus vaccination center in Tel Aviv, Israel, Tuesday, Aug. 10, 2021. Israel is grappling with a surge of infections and urging people over age 60 to get a booster shot. Credit: AP Photo/Oded Balilty

Israel's government on Wednesday advanced a raft of new coronavirus

restrictions, including sweeping implementation of a digital vaccine passport and tighter restrictions on mass gatherings, as the country struggles with skyrocketing new infections.

The country that had appeared to put the coronavirus pandemic behind it a few months ago after a world-leading vaccine drive is now re-imposing regulations in a bid to clamp back down on infections.

The Cabinet gave its approval for the tighter measures—including limitations on people gathering indoors and restricting entry to venues and restaurants to "Green Pass" holders—as new cases of the highly infectious delta variant of the coronavirus surge despite widespread vaccination against COVID-19.

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said the government would be "giving a booster" to the country's healthcare system as new coronavirus cases continue a precipitous climb. He said Israel had to prepare for a situation of mass hospitalizations, and was allocating 2.5 billion shekels (\$774 million) to help boost capacity at hospitals nationwide.

Despite its vaccination campaign, Israel has seen new coronavirus cases rise in recent weeks. The Health Ministry recorded 5,755 new cases on Wednesday, the highest daily figure since February, and serious cases have grown from 19 in mid-June to 400.

At least 6,580 Israelis have died from coronavirus since the start of the pandemic, according to Health Ministry figures.

The government had largely lifted coronavirus restrictions by May following its vaccine drive, but with new infections on the rise, has reinstated limitations on assemblies and indoor mask mandates.

Over 58% of the country's 9.3 million citizens have received two doses

of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. Israel had secured a large supply of the Pfizer vaccines in exchange for trading medical data. Earlier this month Israel starting giving third [vaccine](#) doses to immunosuppressed individuals and citizens over the age of 60.

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