

France to extend virus lockdown, Macron to address nation: presidency

8 April 2020



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France is to further extend a lockdown ordered to slow the spread of the coronavirus, with President Emmanuel Macron to again address the nation next week, the French presidency said Wednesday.

The confinement order "will be extended" beyond its current limit of April 15, a presidential official told AFP, adding that Macron will address the nation on Monday evening to present the new decisions on the fight against the virus.

Macron will from now until Monday "speak to a large number of public and private actors—French, European and international—on what is at stake concerning COVID-19 and prepare the decisions that will be announced on Monday to the French," the presidency said.

It will be Macron's third prime time address from the Elysee Palace since the crisis began.

Macron's address comes amid a nuanced picture of the situation in France, with the daily death toll still grim but some data giving officials room for very cautious optimism.

France has been in lockdown since March 17 to slow the spread of the epidemic, with only essential trips allowed that must be justified with a signed piece of paper.

The country had on Wednesday reported 541 more deaths from COVID-19 in hospital over the last 24 hours, bringing its total official toll from the [coronavirus](#) epidemic to 10,869.

But top French health official Jerome Salomon told reporters there were now 7,148 people in intensive care, a net increase of 17 from the day earlier, the lowest increase recorded in recent weeks.

Salomon said that had slowed the increase of the virus' spread over recent days, adding this was because the lockdown was being largely observed.

"The slowing seen over the last days is linked to your good respect of the confinement rules," he said.

He expressed hope that France would see a flattening in its curve of cases in coming days but emphasised that this "plateau is at a very high level".

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APA citation: France to extend virus lockdown, Macron to address nation: presidency (2020, April 8)
retrieved 7 October 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-04-france-virus-lockdown-macron-nation.html>

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