

Puerto Rico to reopen beaches, gyms after 3-month lockdown

June 12 2020, by Dánica Coto



A Puerto Rican flag flies on an empty beach at Ocean Park, in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Thursday, May 21, 2020. Puerto Rico is cautiously reopening beaches, restaurants, churches, malls, and hair salons under strict conditions as the U.S. territory emerges from a two-month lockdown despite dozens of new coronavirus cases reported daily. (AP Photo/Carlos Giusti)

Puerto Rico's governor announced Thursday that she will lift nearly all restrictions aimed at curbing coronavirus cases, which means beaches, churches and businesses including movie theaters and gyms across the U.S. territory will reopen after three months.

Gov. Wanda Vázquez said the changes will occur starting June 16, when businesses also will be allowed to operate seven days a week and restaurants at 50% capacity. However, she tweaked an ongoing curfew that will remain in place for two weeks from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m.

She also said Puerto Rico will be officially ready to welcome tourists starting July 15 and that airport screenings will continue.

"These have been hard decisions," she said. "Now it's up to each one of us...to decide where to go and how to go about it."

The announcement worried some experts who say the island of 3.2 million people has done too little testing, and most of it using the wrong sort of tests to truly know the extent of the pandemic. The government has reported more than 1,400 confirmed cases and nearly 4,000 [probable cases](#), with at least 144 deaths.

Masks will still be required while outside the home and inside any business.

The changes were cheered by many in the business community, noting that the lockdown lifted by phases in recent weeks has had an overall estimated \$5 billion to \$10 billion impact on the island's economy.

Vázquez's announcement comes a day after the island's [health officials](#) said Puerto Rico saw its peak of COVID-19 cases and related deaths two months ago, a claim that experts also questioned, noting it's based on the limited number of tests available at the time.

Health Department Secretary Lorenzo González said he was confident in the agency's statistics but warned people to maintain social distancing as the island reopens.

"It definitely comes with risk," he said.

Vázquez warned that the restrictions would return if the number of cases, deaths or hospitalizations spike. In addition, public transportation including buses and trains will not operate yet.

"I want people to understand we're still in a pandemic," she said.

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