

Paris hospitals near full capacity as severe COVID cases surge

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Intensive care units at hospitals in the Paris region are nearly saturated with COVID-19 patients, health authorities warned Tuesday, with doctors now putting off non-urgent operations in order to free up more beds.

The surge in cases comes ahead of a government crisis meeting Wednesday, with officials hoping to avoid a new lockdown for the capital as the fast-spreading "British" variant of the coronavirus hits France.

A nationwide curfew of 6 pm is in place, and weekend shutdowns have been ordered for the northern Pas-de-Calais [region](#), where transfers of COVID patients to less crowded hospitals began last week, and in the Mediterranean region surrounding Nice.

In Paris and its suburbs, 1,018 [intensive care unit](#) beds are filled of the 1,050 set aside for COVID patients, the ARS regional health authority said.

It is the first time the number has exceeded 1,000 since November 18, when France was still under

the second nationwide lockdown since the crisis erupted last February.

Officials will now postpone 40 percent of non-urgent operations in order to have a total of 1,577 beds available for COVID cases soon, the agency said.

"I'm not saying we need a lockdown but we need to be aware of the consequences of the current strategy: We're saturated, the numbers keep climbing and we're sending patients elsewhere as much as we can," Stephane Gaudry, an [intensive care](#) doctor at the Avicenne [hospital](#) north of Paris, told AFP.

Overall, France now counts 3,918 COVID patients in intensive care, compared with a peak of 4,900 during the second wave of cases last autumn, and more than 7,000 at the height of the crisis last spring.

But Jerome Salomon, head of the French health authority, reiterated Tuesday that a lockdown for the Paris region "is not currently on the table".

"This is a last resort, and would be proposed to the government and the president if we thought hospitals would not be able to hold up and we were at risk of not being able to take in serious cases," he told RTL radio.

Authorities recorded 299 COVID deaths in the past 24 hours on Tuesday, bringing the country's total to more than 89,000.

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