

# French PM announces limited COVID lockdown for Paris

March 18 2021

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French President Emmanuel Macron, French Health Minister Olivier Veran, right, and Chief of Intensive Care Unit Dr. Jan Hayon listen to staff working in the intensive care ward of the Poissy/Saint-Germain-en-Laye hospital, near Paris, Wednesday, March 17, 2021. With the virus rebounding from Paris to Budapest and beyond, European governments that rushed to suspend use of AstraZeneca vaccines after reports of blood clots are realizing the far-reaching impact of the move. (Yoan Valat, Pool via AP)

French Prime Minister Jean Castex on Thursday announced a limited month-long lockdown for Paris and several other regions to combat surging COVID-19 cases, while insisting the measures would be less strict than in the past.

While non-essential businesses will close and movement outside will be restricted in the affected regions, schools will stay open and outdoor exercise allowed up to 10 kilometres (6 miles) from home, he said.

President Emmanuel Macron had so far resisted imposing a nationwide lockdown this year but his premier said the situation in Paris and elsewhere made the regionally-targeted measures affecting around a third of the country's population unavoidable.

"We are adopting a third way, a way that should allow braking (of the epidemic) without locking (people) up," Castex told reporters.

He said the measures were due to an increased number of COVID-19 cases due to a "third wave" of the virus, with around 1,200 people in intensive care in the Paris region alone.

The other regions affected by the new measures notably also include the Hauts-de-France region of northeast France which covers the city of Lille as well as the Alpes-Maritimes on the Mediterranean, as well as Seine-Maritime and the Eure in the north.

Health Minister Olivier Veran said that there were more people in intensive care in the Paris region than during the second wave in November, with hospital capacity now saturated.



Students attend a lesson in an almost empty amphitheatre at the university of Strasbourg, eastern France, Thursday, March 18, 2021. The world awaits a decision from Europe's top medical regulator into whether there is any evidence to show the AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine is linked to a small number of blood clots reported in people across the continent. (AP Photo/Jean-Francois Badias)

But striking a note of hope he added: "We really hope that with these braking measures we will pass the peak of this wave and on the other side of this wave we will find spring and unlike last year the protection of the population through vaccination."

As in previous lockdowns, a form written out or downloaded on the phone will be needed to justify why a person has left the home in areas

under the new restrictions.

Residents in affected regions will not be allowed to travel to other areas, except for essential business, said Castex.

But Castex said that "while this is not good news" for people living in those regions, the restrictions were less severe this time.

"These confinement measures will not be a repeat of those we imposed in March and last November," said Castex.

Meanwhile, a curfew that has been in place nationwide will also be relaxed all over France so it ends at 7:00 pm rather than 6:00 pm to take account of the longer days, Castex said.



French President Emmanuel Macron, left, speaks with staff working in the intensive care ward of the Poissy/Saint-Germain-en-Laye hospital, near Paris, Wednesday, March 17, 2021. With the virus rebounding from Paris to Budapest and beyond, European governments that rushed to suspend use of AstraZeneca vaccines after reports of blood clots are realizing the far-reaching impact of the move. (Yoan Valat, Pool via AP)

### **'Sets us apart'**

Almost exactly a year ago, Macron ordered France's first national lockdown which was among the strictest in the world, followed by a second at the end of October.

The handling of the health crisis has consequences for Macron, just over 12 months from presidential elections, in which he is expected to seek a second mandate.

The president has been keen to emphasise that limitations in France have been limited this year compared to the lockdowns seen in Britain and Germany.

Defending the president, Castex said had France decided to lock down in January "we would then have inflicted on the country a lockdown of probably three months", adding that keeping schools open was "a choice that sets us apart from many of our neighbours".

### **'Confidence will return'**

But government is well aware that as well as registering soaring cases, France has made a sluggish start to its vaccination campaign with just

5.6 million receiving a first dose.



A medical worker talks to woman in a vaccination center using the Pfizer vaccine in Strasbourg, eastern France, Thursday, March 18, 2021. France is set to announce new coronavirus restrictions on Thursday, including a potential lockdown in the Paris region and in the north of the country, as the number of COVID-19 patients in intensive care units spikes. (AP Photo/Jean-Francois Badias)

This week it suspended use of the AstraZeneca/Oxford jab in line with many European countries after reports of blood clots.

But following a green light from the European Medicines Agency

(EMA) that the vaccine was "safe and effective" the jabs will now resume, Castex said, adding he would himself get the AstraZeneca jab on Friday

"I will get myself vaccinated with this vaccine to show that we can have complete confidence in it," Castex said. "I am convinced that the confidence will return."

French Europe Minister Clement Beaune defended the choice of many European countries to suspend use of the vaccine and refer it to the EMA for safety checks.

"This European procedure was necessary in order to coordinate and remove the doubts," he told AFP.

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