

More French cities placed on maximum coronavirus alert

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Four French cities were on Thursday placed on maximum coronavirus alert, joining Paris and other metropolises where bars have been shuttered in an increasingly urgent bid to brake a fast-accelerating outbreak.

The number of daily [coronavirus](#) infections came in at 18,746 in France

on Wednesday, [health authorities](#) reported, a record since widespread testing began.

The rate of positive test results rose to 9.1 percent from about 4.5 percent a month ago.

"The health situation in France, alas, is continuing to worsen," Health Minister Olivier Veran told the nation in a live broadcast.

"Every day in France, more and more people are being infected, more and more are falling ill, and more and more are suffering serious effects that require hospitalisation," he said.

Veran announced that Lille, Lyon, Grenoble and Saint-Etienne would go on maximum alert level on Saturday, joining Paris, Aix-Marseille and the overseas territory of Guadeloupe.

In these places, bars are closed and restaurants have to take additional safety measures that include a minimum distance between tables and registering clients' addresses to alert them if any fellow diners end up testing positive.

There are also limits on public gatherings.

The latest data showed that some 116 people per 100,000 are now positive for the coronavirus in France, and every 10 infected people infect 11 or 12 in turn, said Veran.

The minister urged people to contribute to the braking effort by wearing face masks and keeping a safe social distance from others, even at home where there has been a concerning increase in the number of young people infecting older, more vulnerable family members.

Living with the virus

Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire announced that a "solidarity fund" to protect jobs and businesses will be expanded to include some 75,000 companies suffering the secondary effects of limitations on tourism, culture and sporting activities—such as car rental companies, florists and travel insurance.

"We have to learn to live with the virus. It is here. It will not disappear overnight," Le Maire said.

"We need to protect ourselves... but we also have to continue working, producing, protecting our jobs, preparing the economy of the France of tomorrow," he said.

On Wednesday, President Emmanuel Macron said the country was "not in a normal situation, and we won't be for several months".

Veran said pressure on hospitals in the Paris region was growing daily, with COVID patients occupying more and more intensive care beds, and other, non-urgent procedures having to be cancelled.

The Paris region's ARS health authority warned of "a huge wave of cases" to come, and urged hospitals to place themselves on emergency footing and mobilise extra doctors.

"We need to throw all our forces into the battle," agency chief Aurelien Rousseau told AFP.

On Wednesday, 455 intensive care beds in Paris and its suburbs were occupied by COVID patients—more than 40 percent of the total.

Le Canard Enchaîné newspaper, citing a confidential report to Macron,

said the number was expected to surge to 85 percent by mid-November.

That could prompt authorities to impose even tougher restrictions on the capital, which already requires people to wear [face masks](#) in all public spaces—indoors and out.

Nationwide, the number of coronavirus patients in hospital rose to 7,514 across France on Wednesday from 7,377 a day earlier, with 1,406 in intensive care. There are 5,000 intensive care beds nationwide.

Also on Wednesday, authorities reported 80 coronavirus deaths in 24 hours, taking the total number for France to 32,445.

The government has said it will do everything possible to avoid another generalised lockdown.

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