

Belgium going in 'right direction' with virus figures

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A month-long semi-lockdown in Belgium is working to limit the spread of and deaths by COVID-19, health authorities said Wednesday, while urging continued vigilance.

Belgium, home to EU institutions and located in a busy intersection for European travel, had been one of the worst-hit in a second wave of the [coronavirus](#) on the continent.

"For the first time in weeks, or even for several months, all indicators are going in the right direction, meaning they are all going down: the number of infections, hospitalisations and—for the first time—the number of deaths," said a COVID-19 Crisis Centre spokesman, Yves Van Laethem.

Restrictions, including the closure of bars, restaurants and cafes, an order to work from home where possible and limiting [social contacts](#), have all proved effective.

It now ranks 14th in Europe for the number of infections per 100,000 people falling from the number-one spot just a few weeks ago.

And the number of deaths has dropped slightly, by five percent over the past seven-day period, to a daily average of 185.

But Van Laethem noted there are still "many patients in hospital" just over 6,000 at last count.

The number of patients with lighter symptoms was declining, but the [number](#) in intensive care, 1,400, especially those with tubes inserted to provide artificial respiration, was "at a plateau," he said.

Van Laethem added that Belgium had resumed testing asymptomatic people and those returning from regions in other countries considered at high risk for [infection](#).

Authorities had paused tests for those categories of people a month ago after labs became overwhelmed by the surge of second-wave infections.

The resumption means people required to quarantine will be able to be tested on their seventh day, when detection rates are higher.

The quarantine period is for 10 days, with authorities adding another four "precaution" days in many cases, during which people can go out masked but must avoid contact with those vulnerable to the disease.

Since the start of the pandemic early this year, Belgium has recorded 540,605 COVID-19 cases and counted 14,839 deaths from the virus.

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