

# Swiss set to stretch COVID restrictions until March

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Switzerland on Wednesday planned to extend the closure of bars, restaurants and leisure facilities until the end of February in a bid to control stubbornly high COVID-19 case numbers.

"The situation is not good; frankly, it's bad," Health Minister Alain Berset told a press conference in the capital Bern.

The pandemic "is not decreasing and remains at a very high level".

The restrictions, which had been due to last until January 22, are set to be extended for a further five weeks.

The government will consult the regional cantons on the proposals before a final decision on January 13.

Switzerland's pandemic restrictions have not been as strict as in other European countries.

However, "the epidemiological situation remains tense: the number of infections, hospitalisations and deaths, as well as the burden on [health](#)

[workers](#), remains very high," the government said in a statement.

Switzerland, population 8.6 million, recorded nearly 4,800 new cases and 65 new deaths on Wednesday, taking its totals to 468,427 cases and 7,400 fatalities.

The Federal Council said it could not see case numbers decreasing significantly in coming weeks and therefore envisaged extending the measures first imposed in late December.

Furthermore, the discovery of "new, more contagious" [coronavirus](#) variants in Britain and South Africa "increases the likelihood of an upsurge".

The government said it would take steps to mitigate the [economic consequences](#) of extending the restrictions.

From Saturday it was ending exemptions from the existing rules for cantons where the virus was less prevalent.

"The Federal Council thus wants to prevent shopping tourism and gastronomic tourism between cantons and strengthen acceptance of the measures," it said.

Switzerland has found the new coronavirus mutation in 28 samples—all people who arrived from Britain, or people with whom they had been in contact.

"This new variant could behave like a new pandemic within the [pandemic](#)," Virginie Masserey, head of the health ministry's infection control department, said Tuesday.

Switzerland was the first continental western European country to start its COVID-19 vaccination campaign, doing so on December 23 with the Pfizer-

BioNTech jab.

With the doses already received from manufacturers, Switzerland can vaccinate the most vulnerable 2.7 percent of the population, said Berset.

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