

Dutch propose curfew to rein in virus; will ban more flights

20 January 2021, by Mike Corder



In this Thursday, Jan. 14, 2021, file photo, closed stores on Dam street and the Royal Palace on Dam Square, rear, are seen in Amsterdam. The Dutch government said Wednesday, Jan. 20, 2021, that it wants to impose a curfew as part of beefed-up restrictions to rein in the spread of new more contagious variants of the coronavirus that already accounts for at least one in every 10 Dutch infections. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong, File)

The Dutch government wants to impose a curfew as part of beefed-up restrictions to rein in the spread of a new more contagious virus variant that already accounts for at least one in 10 Dutch infections.

Prime Minister Mark Rutte said Wednesday that his government also will ban flights from the U.K., South Africa and South America beginning Saturday for a month.

With Rutte's administration in caretaker mode since resigning last week, it will have to convince skeptical lawmakers to back the 8:30 p.m.-to-4:30 a.m. curfew before it can be enforced. A debate is expected Thursday and Rutte appealed for support, saying "we are at a crucial moment for our security, for our national public health."

Rutte's four-party coalition resigned Friday over a scandal involving thousands of parents wrongly being labeled fraudsters by the country's tax office. It remains in office until a new coalition is formed following a March 17 general election.

If parliament approves the curfew, the Netherlands would join other European Union countries that have told people to stay home after dark, including Belgium, France, Italy, Greece and parts of Germany.

"It's a tough measure," Rutte said. "Nobody wants a curfew; nobody is cheering this."



In this Tuesday Dec. 15, 2020, file photo, A skull is glued onto a traffic light on the near-empty Dam Square with the Royal Palace, seen center rear, in Amsterdam, Netherlands. The Dutch government said Wednesday, Jan. 20, 2021, that it wants to impose a curfew as part of beefed-up restrictions to rein in the spread of new more contagious variants of the coronavirus that already accounts for at least one in every 10 Dutch infections.(AP Photo/Peter Dejong, File)



Health Minister Hugo de Jonge said the government also is extending the space between the two doses of vaccines from three weeks to six weeks as a way of speeding up the number of people getting their first shot. The Netherlands was the last European Union country to begin vaccinations and so far only 100,000 people have received their first shot.

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In this Thursday Dec. 31, 2020, file photo, A couple kisses on the near-deserted Nieuwmarkt square in Amsterdam, Netherlands, Thursday, Dec. 31, 2020. The Dutch government said Wednesday, Jan. 20, 2021, that it wants to impose a curfew as part of beefed-up restrictions to rein in the spread of new more contagious variants of the coronavirus that already accounts for at least one in every 10 Dutch infections.(AP Photo/Peter Dejong, File)

The Netherlands has been in a tough lockdown for a month and will remain that way until at least Feb. 9, but the government says a slow decrease in the number of infections and the threat posed by new variants have forced it to take tougher action.

Rutte said the number of visitors people are allowed at home will now be cut from two to one at a time, and the number of people allowed to attend funerals will be halved from the current 100.

The Dutch public health institute announced Tuesday that new infections decreased 21.5% over the past week to 38,776 as the lockdown that began in mid-December began to bear fruit. But at the same time, it warned that the new, more transmissible virus variant that led to a sharp spike in infections in the U.K. and Ireland is expected to make up at least half of all new Dutch COVID-19 cases by mid-February.

The Netherlands has counted 13,264 deaths in the pandemic, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University.

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