

France to impose virus lockdowns on three more regions

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The French government said Wednesday that virus lockdowns would be expanded to three more areas, including Lyon, as doctors grapple with a third wave of new cases.

Most businesses in the Rhone, Aube and Nievre departments will have to close and residents stay home except for essential outings, government spokesman Gabriel Attal said after a weekly pandemic crisis meeting chaired by President Emmanuel Macron.

Sixteen departments including the Paris region have already been under a third lockdown since the pandemic erupted last year, and a 7:00pm curfew applies to the rest of the country.

However schools remain open and people are not required to fill out forms to justify local trips out, raising concerns among medics over whether the measures will be sufficient.

Macron has said the measures should not even be described as a lockdown, with the government calling them a "third way" to put a brake on the

virus without closing down the country.

The new restrictions are set to last for at least four weeks, which officials hope will be enough time to ease pressure on hospitals while authorities race to get more people vaccinated.

Attal also urged more companies to enforce work-from-home guidelines that limit an on-site presence to just one day a week in the areas where [coronavirus](#) cases are surging.

More than three dozen mass vaccination centres will be opened in the coming weeks staffed by firefighters and civil security brigades, Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said Wednesday.

They will operate seven days a week in order to administer up to 530,000 doses as week, he told RMC radio, as France pushes to have at least 10 million people vaccinated by mid-April and 20 million by mid-May.

So far nearly 6.6 million people have received a first dose of the three vaccines available in France, according to the health ministry, with the pace of injections increasing after a slow start in January.

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