

Ireland puts nation under strict quarantine for six weeks

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Street in Galway city, Ireland. (Photo: Reuters/Clodagh Kilcoyne)

Dublin, October 23 (RHC)-- Ireland has decided to impose a national lockdown for six weeks that has been described by the Irish government itself as the harshest in Europe – all to curb the spread of COVID-19 that has been topping record levels for days.

Under the newly announced measures that went into force starting midnight Wednesday, all non-essential retail stores will be shut down while restaurants and pubs will have to reduce their work to take-away services only.

The people in Ireland would also be barred from traveling more than five kilometers away from their homes. Yet, unlike many other European nations, Ireland does not plan to shut down schools. Essential services such as construction will be exempted from the lockdown as well. As will be hotels – but only if their rooms are rented by people working in any “essential” sectors.

"In the effort to suppress the virus, we've already introduced what is probably Europe's strictest regime," Prime Minister Micheal Martin said in a televised address on Monday. The government has decided that the evidence of a potentially grave situation arising in the weeks ahead is now too strong.

The move comes just two weeks after Dublin dismissed a “surprise” call by the nation’s health authorities to introduce the highest – fifth – level of restrictions amid the growing infection numbers.

The nation has already topped its autumn record for daily new Covid-19 cases five times over the last nine days, although the numbers still remain lower than those recorded on April 10 when the infections surpassed 1,500 in a single day, according to Johns Hopkins University.

Ireland is no stranger to harsh measure when it comes to combating the epidemic. Back in the spring, it also imposed one of the longest lockdowns in Europe and eased the restrictions at such a low pace that some hospitality venues have barely managed to reopen by the time the rising infection numbers forced the authorities to bring the curbs back.

To help its economy survive the epidemic, Dublin poured additional funds into coronavirus-related jobless payments and wage subsidies. A new budget approved last week involves one of the biggest financial aid packages in the nation’s history, including payments of up to ? 5,000 (\$5,884.50) per week for affected businesses. Still, the number of people seeking jobless payments has increased by 20 percent over just two weeks and reached 244,153.

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