

Sydney exits lockdown as Australia gears up to live with COVID

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Sydney, October 11 (RHC)-- People in Sydney, Australia's biggest city, ignored grey skies and drizzle on Monday to celebrate the end of almost four months of lockdown on Monday as fully vaccinated people were allowed once again to get their hair cut and go to cafes, restaurants and shops.

The city's more than five million residents spent 106 days in lockdown as the authorities tried to curb the spread of the highly transmissible Delta variant. With new infections now falling – New South Wales state recorded 496 cases on Monday – and more than 70 percent of people over the age of 16 fully vaccinated, the city is now reopening.

Since June, shops, schools, salons and offices have been closed for non-essential workers and there have been unprecedented restrictions on Australians personal freedom with people banned from travelling more than five kilometres (three miles) from home or visiting family.

"I see it as a day of freedom, it's a freedom day," New South Wales (NSW) state Premier Dominic Perrottet told reporters. For most of the pandemic, Australia successfully suppressed infections through border closures, lockdowns and aggressive testing and tracing.

But the Delta variant put paid to its goal of "COVID-zero", and Sydney and Melbourne are now shifting their approach towards one of "living with COVID". "It's a big day for our state," Perrottet said.

After "100 days of blood, sweat and no beers," he said, "you've earned it."

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