

Madrid placed under partial lockdown due to COVID-19 surge



Madrid, October 3 (RHC)-- Some 4.8 million Madrid residents have been barred from leaving the city since Friday evening, making it the first European capital to return to lockdown due to surging coronavirus cases.

Restaurants and bars in the Spanish capital and nine satellite towns shut early and slashed capacity by half in what has again become Europe's worst infection hotspot.

The new restrictions are not as strict as the previous lockdown from March, when people were barred from leaving their homes. However, authorities advised residents not to move around unless absolutely necessary.

"Madrileños" were exasperated at political wrangling between the central and regional governments, and anxious about whether the measures would work. "We have been eight months with masks and without nightclubs and parties, and there is still contagion. Then what kind of impact will these restrictions make?"

Sonny van den Holstein, owner of Sanissimo restaurant, told reporters.

“People are confused, they hesitate to go out ... they are in fear,” he said, as a customer called to cancel a reservation.

The conservative-led Madrid area authority reluctantly complied with the order from the Socialist-led central government to ban travel except for school, work, health or shopping.

Famous for its late-night carousing and usually lively tourist flow, Madrid’s bars and restaurants must close at 11pm (21:00 GMT) instead of a previous 1am (23:00 GMT) curfew, while restaurants, gyms and shops are having their capacity cut by half. Gatherings of more than six people remain banned indoors and outdoors, but parks and playgrounds can this time stay open.

The measures widen a confinement already in place in poorer parts of the city with high infection rates. People who do not comply will face fines. Other busy European cities have tightened measures in recent days, including limiting numbers in restaurants and making face masks compulsory in more places.

But none have gone as far as Madrid. The new lockdown will last at least 14 days and could be extended if needed. Conservative regional head Isabel Diaz Ayuso has launched a legal challenge, fearing economic damage and accusing the central government of exceeding its mandate by ordering the measures.

With Madrid’s international airport Barajas staying open, Diaz Ayuso tweeted her anger at the prime minister: “From tomorrow one will be able to get to Madrid from Berlin but not from Parla. Thanks for the chaos, Pedro Sanchez.” Parla is a periphery town south of Madrid.

Spain recorded a total of 789,932 coronavirus cases as of Friday, a rise of 11,325 since Thursday. There have been 32,086 fatalities. Daily deaths are now around their highest levels since early May but far below the late March record of nearly 900.

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