

France is latest nation to return to lockdown amid COVID surge

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Paris, October 29 (RHC)-- France will go back into a nationwide lockdown starting this week to try to contain the COVID-19 pandemic that is again threatening to spiral out of control, French President Emmanuel Macron said in an address to the nation.

The new measures announced by Macron -- which come into force on Friday and will last until December 1 -- will mean people have to stay in their homes except to buy essential goods, seek medical attention, or use their daily one-hour allocation of exercise.

Anyone leaving their home will have to carry a special document justifying being outside, which can be checked by police, Macron said. Restaurants, cafes and shops not selling essential goods will have to close down for at least the next two weeks, Macron said.

In addition to France, Germany announced sweeping nationwide restrictions on Wednesday. The news that two of Europe's largest economies were partially locking down again sent world stock markets lower

and came after Ireland imposed less drastic measures last week.

In France, people will still be allowed to go to work if their employer deems it impossible for them to do the job from home, and -- in a departure from the previous lockdown in March -- schools will remain open, Macron said in his address.

"The virus is circulating at a speed that not even the most pessimistic forecasts had anticipated," Macron said. "We are all in the same position: overrun by a second wave which we know will be harder, more deadly than the first."

Macron said: "I've decided that we need to return to the lockdown which halted the virus." Addressing the French nation, he said: "I have faith in us, in you, faith in our ability to overcome this challenge. We will get over this if we are united, and we are united."

The new measures echo the eight-week lockdown that France enforced in the earlier in the year, when hospitalisations and deaths caused by the COVID-19 epidemic reached a peak. The lockdown was effective at containing the epidemic, but the virus started spreading again after relaxing rules starting May 11.

France on Tuesday reported 523 new deaths from coronavirus during the previous 24 hours, the highest daily toll since April, when the virus was at its most severe. Doctors have warned that intensive care units risk becoming overwhelmed.

France's death toll, at more than 35,000, is the seventh highest in the world, according to Reuters News Agency data.

Earlier this month, Macron announced a night-time curfew in Paris and other big cities, but officials this week acknowledged that measure had proved insufficient to bring down infection rates, requiring a more drastic response.

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