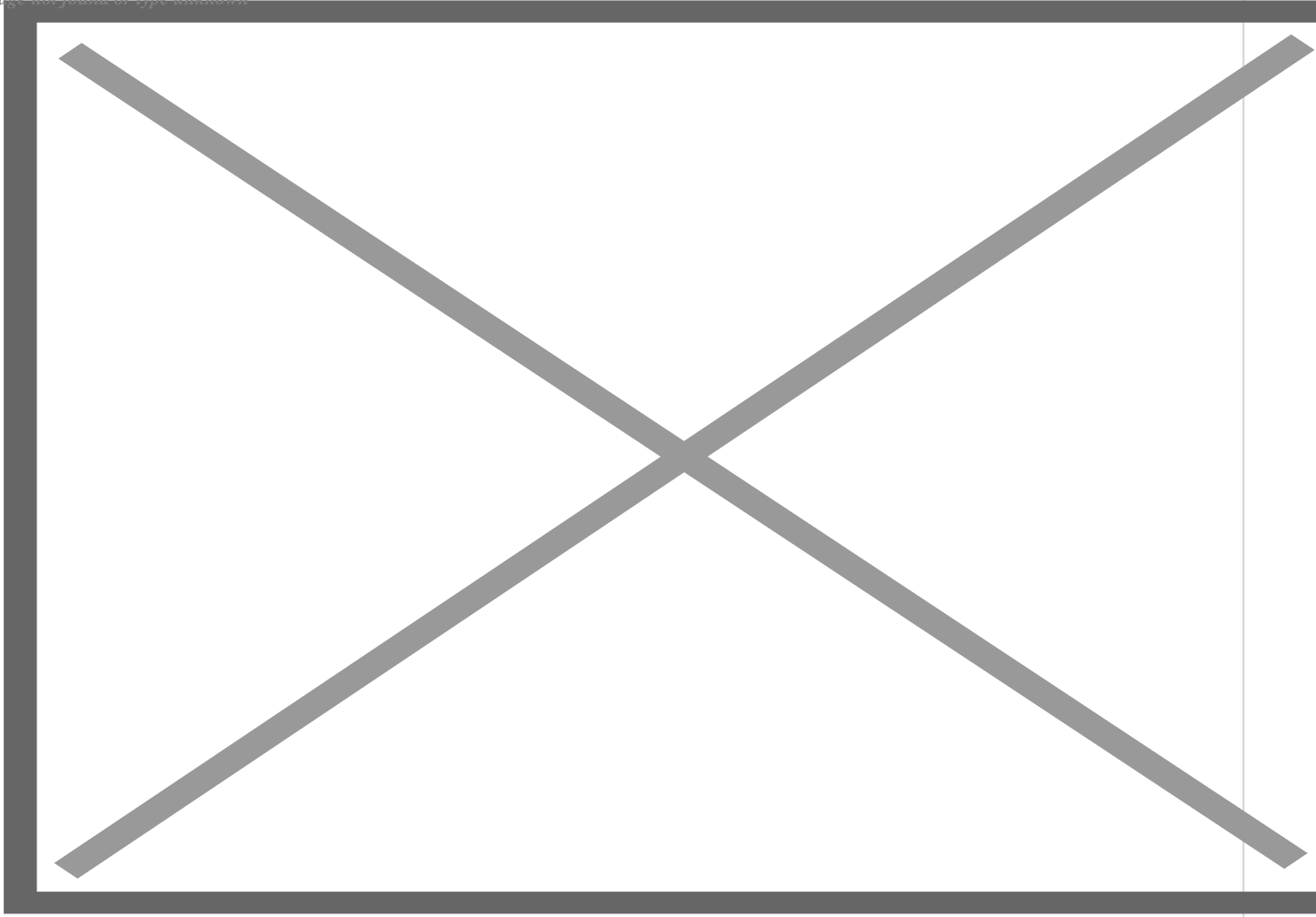


Pakistan places new restrictions amid rise in COVID cases

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**Shoppers walk past a food court at the Dolmen Mall Clifton in Karachi, Pakistan.
[File: Asim Hafeez/Bloomberg via Getty Images]**

Islamabad, January 20 (RHC)-- Pakistani authorities have placed new restrictions on gatherings and in some schools in major cities in a bid to control the rapidly rising cases of the country's fifth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The restrictions, which include a ban on indoor gatherings and any indoor dining at restaurants, came into effect on Thursday, the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC), which is coordinating the government's coronavirus response, said in a statement.

Those bans are being implemented in cities where three-day average test-positive rates are higher than 10 percent, including Karachi, Lahore, the capital Islamabad and the southern city of Hyderabad. Regions where the test-positive rates are lower face less stringent restrictions.

In the worst-affected cities, schools have been instructed to reduce in-person teaching for under-12s to 50 percent, with a further requirement for all students above the age of 12 to be vaccinated against COVID-19 by February 1st.

Entertainment and other venues including gyms, cinemas, amusement parks, shrines and sports venues also face increased restrictions beginning Friday, the NCOC statement said.

Pakistan on Wednesday registered 6,808 new cases of COVID-19, the second-highest ever daily case rise since the pandemic began, according to official data. Active cases rose by 6,377, the highest-ever rise in the same period, the data showed.

The national test-positive rate was registered at 11.55 percent, with a large number of new cases appearing in major cities like Karachi, a sprawling metropolis of more than 20 million people located on the Arabian Sea coast.

Relative to many European countries and the United States, the South Asian country of Pakistan has appeared to have a less severe experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, with 29,042 deaths since infections began.

In the country of 220 million people, the government has so far registered 169.92 million doses of the vaccine as having been administered, with 78 million citizens registered as having received at least two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine, according to government data.

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