

Netherlands to shut down at night in Covid battle (Update)

November 26 2021



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The Netherlands will be "effectively closed" in the evenings with bars, restaurants and shops shutting early to curb a spike in COVID cases, Prime Minister Mark Rutte said Friday.

Dozens of protesters held a peaceful demonstration in The Hague as Rutte tightened the country's partial lockdown, as hospitals warned they are being overwhelmed.

But fears of a repeat of the riots that swept the country last weekend over the government's coronavirus restrictions proved, for the time being, unfounded.

"From Sunday, the whole of the Netherlands is effectively closed between 5pm and 5am," Rutte told a televised press conference.

"We have to be realistic, the daily figures are still too high," he added, referring to infection figures which are running at more than 20,000 cases a day, despite an adult vaccination take up of around 85 percent.

Rutte acknowledged that the government had failed to get across the message that people with symptoms need to get tested, since it last tightened the measures two weeks ago.

"I blame myself for that," he said. "We have to do better."

Non-essential shops had previously been allowed to stay open until 6:00 pm, and catering establishments until 8:00 pm.

Amateur sports will also have to stop after 5:00pm, while professional sports including football matches will continue to be played behind closed doors.

Patrons must now wear masks and maintain social distancing of 1.5 metres (five feet), meaning that cafes, cinemas, theatres and other venues will have reduced capacity, Rutte said.

'Snot-bubble guideline'

Schools will remain open, despite the fact that the largest rise in infections is among children. Pupils aged 10 and above must wear masks in hallways.

The government is also tightening its "snot-bubble guideline" so that primary school children with even a mild cold must stay home and be tested, it said in a statement.

Hospitals will meanwhile cancel non-critical operations such as knee and hip surgery.

In the protest near government ministries, people rang bells, blew whistles and sirens while many held signs saying "It is not right". One wore a star of David on his mask.

Police vans and riot officers stood guard near the protest. Police said they had made several arrests for possession of illegal fireworks and failure to show ID.

"COVID is just like a flu, it is a virus that we need to learn how to live with as a society, not trying to fight against it because it doesn't work," said Babs, a 38-year-old woman holding a sign reading "stop lying".

Another protester who gave his name as David added: "The authorities are going in the wrong direction to use a virus which isn't dangerous for the 'great reset' to curb our liberties."

The protesters eventually dispersed peacefully but police said they remained on alert.

The Netherlands lifted most coronavirus restrictions in September but was forced to reintroduce them in October.

Riots broke out in Rotterdam last Friday and the trouble spread to The Hague on Saturday and to other cities including Groningen in the north on Sunday and Monday.

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