

Ireland is first EU country to re-enter lockdown

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Ireland will be the first EU country to return to coronavirus lockdown, prime minister Micheal Martin said Monday, issuing a nationwide "stay at home" order but insisting schools will stay open.

Measures coming into effect for six weeks from midnight on Wednesday (2300 GMT) will see all non-essential retail businesses close and bars and restaurants limited to takeaway or delivery service only.

"Everyone in the country is being asked to stay at home," Martin said in a televised national address.

Only essential workers will be "permitted to travel to work", he said, and citizens will be allowed out to exercise only within five kilometres (three miles) of their residence.

The government warned in a statement that "there will be a penalty" for violating the five kilometre restriction and that [public transport](#) will operate at 25 percent capacity to serve essential workers only.

Martin said schools and childcare facilities are to

remain open "because we cannot and will not allow our children and [young people](#)'s futures to be another victim of this disease."

A ban on visits between different households and on indoor events will also be extended, although two households will be allowed to mix at outdoor venues such as parks.

A "social bubble" programme will also allow those living alone, at risk of social isolation or [mental health issues](#), to mingle with one other household.

And unlike under the previous shutdown order issued in March, elite and professional level sports will be permitted behind closed doors across Ireland—which has suffered 1,852 deaths from the [coronavirus](#).

'Saving Christmas'

Martin said the Republic's present restrictions were "probably Europe's strictest regime" but that "further action is now required".

"If we pull together over the next six weeks, we will have the opportunity to celebrate Christmas in a meaningful way," he said.

Lobby group Retail Ireland predicted "tens of thousands of retail workers will be out of work" in the interim.

"It is crucial that these measures work and we are in a place to reopen retail in advance of Christmas," warned director Arnold Dillon.

"We simply cannot contemplate serious rolling restrictions into the future."

Ireland has generally taken a cautious stance in fighting the fight against coronavirus.

There are currently no "green list" countries on the

nation's register of safe travel destinations and the government enacted pub closures dubbed "Europe's longest".

But Dublin's decision to return the nation to lockdown comes two weeks after the government rejected a similar recommendation from public health chiefs.

At the time, deputy prime minister Leo Varadkar said the advice to take the country to a four week lockdown "hadn't been thought through".

The coalition government's admission that a longer six week lockdown is now necessary could leave it vulnerable to accusations it stalled the public health response to the surging virus.

Daily deaths from the coronavirus in Ireland peaked at 77 in April and in recent weeks have consistently remained in the single digits, with none registered Monday.

However like many other nations the Republic is witnessing a resurgence in confirmed infections of the virus, with 1,031 new cases registered on Monday.

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