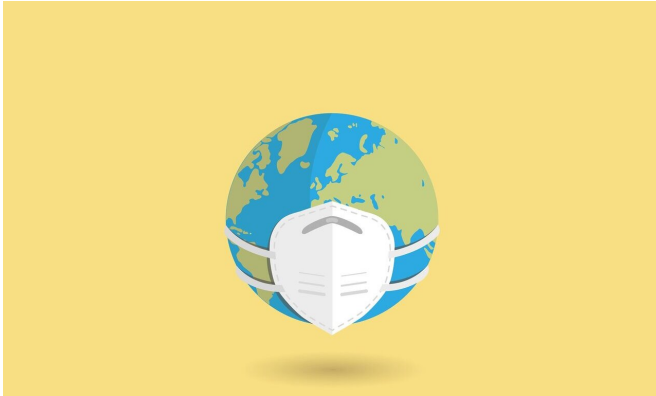


Ireland imposes new virus curbs over Christmas

22 December 2020



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Ireland on Tuesday announced fresh coronavirus restrictions with adjustments from Christmas until January 12 to curb the spread of new infections.

In a television address Irish Prime Minister Micheal Martin said his government had chosen to reintroduce the highest level of restrictions, level five, following an "extraordinary growth" in the virus.

Under the measures families will be asked to stay at home with some specific changes over the festive period.

Non-essential shops will be allowed to stay open and January sales will be postponed. Schools will also remain open.

Martin said the a current daily growth rate of "approximately 10 percent" was "obviously a source of serious concern, and is simply not sustainable".

He explained there was no "firm evidence" that a new strain of the virus which has spread in the south of England had reached Ireland. But he

added that the high growth rate in the country meant the "most responsible thing to do is to proceed on the assumption that it is already here".

Under the special measures, the new restrictions will be imposed from Christmas Eve on 24 December until 12 January.

Individuals will be permitted to beyond county borders until December 26 but not after.

Only two households will be allowed to mix from 27 December and hairdressers, restaurants and pubs that serve food must all also close on December 24.

In spite of the new restrictions, which will put extra pressure particularly on the Irish hospitality sector during the lucrative Christmas period, Martin sought to sound a note of optimism.

"As despondent as any of us might feel with the return of restrictions. It is important to remember that the hope is real, there is light at the end of this tunnel," he said.

The Irish Prime Minister said he had confirmed the arrival of 10,000 vaccines against the disease with the rollout of the shot for the most vulnerable.

"I am certain that our vaccination programme would bring us greater freedom and how we manage the virus in the new year," he said.

Ireland, which has nearly five million inhabitants, has recorded 2,158 deaths since the start of the pandemic and 80,267 cases, according to figures released on Monday.

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