

France tightens curfew as illegal mass rave ends

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Millions in France faced tightened curfew restrictions Saturday to combat a high rate of coronavirus cases, as police booked hundreds of New Year revellers for flouting anti-COVID measures at an illegal rave in the country.

The [coronavirus](#) has killed more than 1.8 million people globally since emerging in China in December 2019, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP.

But experts believe the worst is yet to come, predicting a sharp rise in cases and deaths after weeks of holiday gatherings.

In Bangkok, the city's nightlife went quiet as a ban on bars, nightclubs and restaurant alcohol sales went into effect, among a raft of restrictions aimed at curbing the kingdom's rising coronavirus toll.

The Thai capital also announced that public schools would close for two weeks, while more than a dozen virus checkpoints are set up across the city.

Thailand initially appeared to have escaped the

worst of the virus, but an outbreak last month at a massive seafood market has spiralled into a resurgence, with infections now detected in 53 of the kingdom's 77 provinces.

And in Tokyo, the city's governor on Saturday asked Japan's government to declare a new state of emergency as the country battles a third wave of the coronavirus, with record numbers of new cases.

The measure allows local governors to call on businesses to close and to request people stay at home.

Vaccine race

The soaring numbers of infections around the world means the desperate race to vaccinate is set to dominate the coming year.

The vaccination programme in the United States has been beset by logistical problems, even as the world's worst-hit country passed 20 million cases.

In Russia, Health Minister Mikhail Murashko said that more than 800,000 people had received the domestically produced Sputnik V vaccine and that 1.5 million doses had been distributed throughout the country of around 147 million.

The Kremlin has held back on imposing nationwide virus restrictions and instead placed its hopes on the mass vaccination drive to end the pandemic and save its struggling economy from the hit of another lockdown.

The French government, facing the threat of a new wave of COVID-19 infections, extended a nighttime curfew by two hours in parts of the country to help combat the virus.

The curfew will start at 6 pm, rather than 8pm in 15 of France's 101 departments, most of them in the country's east.

Paris has, for now, been spared the additional restriction.

The curfew restrictions came as an illegal rave in northwestern France ended on Saturday after more than two days of partying that saw clashes with police.

'We had to party'

Around 800 people were booked for flouting anti-virus measures, while the regional health authority in Brittany noted the "high risk of the spread of COVID-19" at the event.

"We knew what we were risking... we had to party, for a year everything has been stuck," said one of the revellers, a 20-year-old waitress.

Another party was broken up by police on Saturday near the Spanish city of Barcelona, where 300 people had been partying for more than 40 hours.

Football players were also among those caught breaking coronavirus rules, with Tottenham's Erik Lamela, Sergio Reguilon and Giovanni Lo Celso to be disciplined after a picture emerged of them attending a large party.

Elsewhere, Norway, which has one of the lowest infection rates in Europe, on Saturday began requiring COVID-19 tests upon arrival into the country.

Travellers from abroad must quarantine for seven days and test negative twice as part of the new restrictions, imposed after Norway recorded five cases of a new coronavirus variant that first emerged in Britain.

Denmark discovered 86 cases of the new variant, which is feared to be more contagious.

The Greek government also announced a new extension, until January 10, of its strict two-month lockdown measures, ending an easing of the restrictions over the holiday period.

In Lebanon, medics warned that hospitals are being overwhelmed by coronavirus cases, as infection

rates surge in the wake of end of year holidays.

But in Australia, the finishing touches were being put on a glitzy show at the Sydney Opera House Saturday, as the venue prepared to host an opera crowd for the first time since March following a virus hiatus.

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