

Portugal returning to virus lockdown Friday, says PM

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Portugal will return to a lockdown to tackle a surge in coronavirus cases, Prime Minister Antonio Costa announced Wednesday.

The fresh lockdown, starting Friday, will mean a return to the restrictions in place in March and April 2020, said Costa after a special cabinet meeting.

That means non-essential shops, cafes and restaurants will all close. But this time round, the schools will remain open.

"The rule is simple," said Costa. "Each one of us has to stay at home."

People will be able to leave their homes to vote in the first round of the presidential election on January 24. From Sunday, they will even be able to vote early if they want to.

But the authorities will require a negative [coronavirus](#) test for anyone flying into the country, the country's Foreign Minister Augusto Santos Silva said.

Portugal has had some restrictions in place to try

to stem the rising tide of coronavirus cases since November, including limited lockdowns and curfews in the regions worst hit by the crisis.

But after the rules were relaxed over the holiday period, the number of cases rose.

The country recorded 10,556 cases and 156 deaths over the previous 24 hours. Its current total caseload stands at just over 507,000 and 8,236 deaths.

"We are currently living at the most dangerous moment, but also the one of most hope," said Costa, referring to the [vaccination programme](#) launched across Europe at the end of December.

"We must come together to rein in this pandemic, flatten the curve and save lives," he said.

According to an AFP tally, Portugal ranks sixth in the world in the number of new infections in proportion to its population over the past seven days.

A week ago, health minister Marta Temido expressed concern that hospitals were coming under "enormous pressure".

Just over 4,200 people were hospitalised on Wednesday, of whom nearly 600 were placed in intensive care.

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