

Italy to extend virus curbs until April 6: minister

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Italy should brace for another month of restrictions due to the threat posed by new strains of the coronavirus, its Health Minister Roberto Speranza said Wednesday.

The government is expected to adopt a new decree in the coming days, extending a three-tier system of regional restrictions currently set to expire on March 5.

"We are in no epidemiological condition today to relax the measures against the pandemic," Speranza said, indicating that curbs would be extended until April 6.

"Telling the country the truth is an obligation we must all strongly feel, even when this truth is uncomfortable," the minister said.

He noted that 25 Italian towns or provinces had recently gone into lockdown due to outbreaks of British, South African or Brazilian strains of the [coronavirus](#).

The faster rate of transmission of the new variants "makes it even more essential for the country to raise its guard," Speranza said.

"It is still possible to contain their spread, as long as very rigorous measures are adopted and quickly enforced," he added, referring to localised lockdowns.

The situation is particularly critical in the southern Molise region, where the army was due to step in to provide extra intensive care hospital beds.

Italy's new prime minister, former European Central Bank chief Mario Draghi, has made fighting the pandemic his number one priority.

Italy, the first country in Europe to be struck by the coronavirus [pandemic](#) one year ago, has paid a heavy price during the last 12 months.

More than 96,000 people with COVID-19 have died, while the economy plunged by nearly nine percent in 2020, the worst recession since World War II.

Meanwhile, the country's vaccination campaign has struggled, mostly due to Europe-wide supply problems. Only some 1.3 million people have been fully vaccinated so far.

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