

# Slovakia imposes overnight curfew to fight COVID

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Slovakia imposed an overnight curfew from Wednesday, the health ministry said, as the ex-communist country battles the world's highest Covid mortality rate.

Slovaks will not be allowed out of their homes between 8:00 pm and 5:00 am, according to a government decree.

During the day, Slovaks are being asked to stay in their homes with some exceptions, including medical visits, going to work and walks in nature or with pets.

The curfew applies until March 19 but may be extended.

The EU country of 5.4 million has the world's highest rate of Covid deaths, with 24 fatalities per

100,000 inhabitants over the last 14 days, according to an AFP tally.

The high rate "is due to many factors, Slovakia has made several mistakes," Doctors' Trade Union Association chairman Peter Visolajsky told AFP earlier.

"The lockdown was introduced too late and it is not sufficiently monitored. Also, this mortality rate is caused by the overall bad condition of Slovak healthcare," Visolajsky said.

The expert said that, rather than adopting more restrictions, better enforcement of those already in place "could reduce the number of infections".

Slovakia on Monday became the second country in the EU after Hungary to receive a shipment of Russia's Sputnik V vaccines after ordering two million of the jabs.

The decision has proved highly divisive within the governing coalition of Prime Minister Igor Matovic.

Foreign Minister Ivan Korcok has called the vaccine a tool in the Kremlin's "hybrid war" against the West.

One of the four centre-right parties in the coalition has called for a reshuffle, accusing the government of mismanaging the pandemic and buying Russian vaccines without the consent of the whole cabinet.

President Zuzana Caputova has said that only vaccines approved by the European Medicines Agency should be used in Slovakia, which would exclude Sputnik V.

The country is struggling to control the pandemic and has called on its EU partners for assistance.

So far, Poland has agreed to take in 10 Slovak patients for treatment and Romania has sent a

medical team.

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