

Rio tightens restrictions as COVID surges in Brazil

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Rio de Janeiro announced new restrictions Thursday on bars, restaurants and beaches, seeking to contain a surge of COVID-19 that is pushing Brazil's hospitals to the breaking point.

The city of 6.7 million people is the latest to go back on partial lockdown in Brazil, which has registered record COVID-19 death tolls the past two days and is having its deadliest week of the pandemic.

Far-right President Jair Bolsonaro continues to downplay the new [coronavirus](#), leaving cities and states to implement a patchwork of containment measures on their own.

Rio's new decree, which takes effect Friday for one week, orders bars and restaurants to close at 5:00 pm, shuts all [commercial activity](#) on the city's famed beaches, and bans night clubs, "samba circles" and other parties.

"All the measures we are announcing today have a single objective: to make sure 2021 is not a repeat of the genocide that happened in Rio de Janeiro in 2020," said Mayor Eduardo Paes, who took office

in January, ousting Bolsonaro ally Marcelo Crivella.

The decree also forbids people from lingering in [public spaces](#) from 11:00 pm to 5:00 am, though traffic will not be restricted.

Shops will be allowed to remain open until 8:00 pm, but, like bars and restaurants, must limit customers to 40 percent of capacity.

Paes said a sharp rise in severe respiratory emergencies led to the decision, though he said the city's hospitals were not facing imminent collapse, as they are in many parts of Brazil.

The measures come after Sao Paulo state—Brazil's largest, with 46 million people—declared a new "code red" Wednesday, ordering non-essential businesses closed for two weeks starting Saturday.

Brazil's [health ministry](#) has recorded an average of more than 1,300 COVID-19 deaths per day over the past week, the worst yet for the hard-hit country of 212 million people.

An explosion of cases blamed partly on a new variant of the virus that emerged in the Amazon rainforest has filled intensive care units almost to capacity in many areas.

Nearly 260,000 people have died of COVID-19 in Brazil, the second-highest death toll in the pandemic, after the United States.

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