

Swiss ease COVID restrictions despite 'fragile' situation

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Switzerland's government announced Wednesday it will significantly ease its COVID-19 restrictions despite acknowledging that the country's virus situation "remains fragile" and has even worsened recently.

As of Monday, Swiss restaurants and bars, which have been closed since December, will be permitted to open outdoor seating areas, the government said.

Cinemas and other leisure facilities will reopen, as will outdoor and indoor sports facilities.

Public events with up to 50 people indoors and 100 people outdoors will be permitted, as will face-to-face teaching at universities and other higher education institutions.

The government acknowledged it is lifting restrictions despite the fact that the epidemiological situation in the landlocked country "remains fragile and has even worsened in recent weeks".

But, it estimated that "the risks associated with this easing (of restrictions) are acceptable".

Switzerland, a country of 8.6 million people, has to date counted more than 625,000 [coronavirus](#) cases and 9,790 deaths.

Daily case rates in the landlocked, Alpine nation are roughly the same as in neighbours Germany and Italy, though lower than the European Union average—and nearly a third of the rate in neighbouring France.

Swiss daily case rates bottomed out in the second half of February but have been on the rise since early March.

'Maintain control'

Health Minister Alain Berset told reporters that a strategy of slowly lifting restrictions in recent months had allowed the country to "maintain control over the pandemic".

"We're not facing an explosion," he said.

While the case incidence rate remains too high, the government pointed out that hospitals are not overburdened.

It also highlighted progress made on vaccinations, with nearly half of people aged over 80 and around 30 percent of those aged between 70 and 79 now fully immunised.

Switzerland has administered 1.8 million vaccine doses, with 686,000 people now having received both injections—giving the country one of Europe's higher fully-vaccinated rates.

Berset cautioned that the easing of restrictions should not be seen as a signal that the danger is over and the population can let down its guard.

"That is not at all the case," he said. "We need to continue being careful."

Virtually all the activities again permitted from Monday should be practised only while wearing a [face mask](#) and with appropriate physical distancing, the government said.

And as far as possible, activities should take place outdoors, where the risk of infection is far lower.

The government meanwhile said that other restrictions, including a requirement for most people to work from home and the closure of indoor restaurants and bars, would remain in place for the time being.

The [government](#) warned that it is closely following developments and in particular hospital bed occupancy, and said it would reinstate lifted restrictions if needed.

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