

Portugal plans more reopenings next week

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Portugal will push ahead with a phased exit from its virus lockdown on Monday with the reopening of restaurants, shopping centres, theatres, high schools and universities, the government announced.

Eleven municipalities out of a total of more than 300 will however not be able to proceed with the step due to an elevated COVID-19 incidence level, officials said Thursday.

"Most of the country will move Monday to the next stage of reopening," Prime Minister Antonio Costa said after a cabinet meeting.

It will be the third step of four in a gradual lifting of restrictions that began in mid-March, following two months of lockdown that helped stem a severe third wave of the pandemic.

The lifting of measures began with the reopening of primary schools a month ago, followed at the start of April by secondary schools and outdoor service for cafes and restaurants.

Controls at the Spanish border will be maintained for at least 15 more days along with a requirement for travellers to present a negative COVID-19 test.

Since the lifting of measures began, the number of new daily cases in Portugal has stabilised at around 500 compared to a peak of nearly 13,000 in late January.

The number of people hospitalised for COVID has also fallen below 500 for the first time since September.

Of the 11 municipalities with elevated incidence levels, seven will stick with current restrictions while four will revert to measures that were in place until Easter weekend 10 days ago.

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