

Portugal reimposes partial lockdown in most of the country

LISBON (Reuters) – Portugal’s government on Saturday announced new lockdown restrictions from Nov. 4 for most of the country, telling people to stay at home except for outings for work, school or shopping, and ordering companies to switch to remote working.

A day after daily coronavirus infections hit a record high, Prime Minister Antonio Costa said the measures would cover 121 municipalities, including the key regions of Lisbon and Porto. The affected areas are home to about 70% of Portugal’s population of roughly 10 million.

The lockdown list includes municipalities where more than 240 new infections have been registered per 100,000 people for the past 14 days, and will be reviewed every 15 days, Costa said in a televised news conference.

“If nothing is done, the rise in infections will inevitably lead us to a situation of failure of our health system,” he said.

“We have a very tough month ahead of us. It is more likely we will add more municipalities than we drop from that list next time,” he said.

Portugal has recorded a comparatively low 141,279 infections and 2,507 deaths, but daily cases hit a record 4,656 on Friday before retreating to 4,007 on Saturday, when the death toll rose by 39.

A total of 1,972 people are in hospital after a non-stop increase in hospitalizations over the past two weeks, with 286 people in intensive care units.

The health system, which prior to the pandemic had the lowest number of critical care beds per 100,000 inhabitants in Europe, can accommodate 800 COVID-19 patients in ICUs.

Movement between Portugal’s municipalities had already been prohibited between Friday and Nov. 3 to reduce risk of virus transmission during the All Saints holiday.

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