

# COVID-19 CAUSES NEW RESTRICTIVE MEASURES AND LOCKDOWNS ACROSS ASIA



A new wave of COVID-19 is causing new restrictive measures to be implemented in several Asian countries in light of the increased number of contagions and deaths.

The death toll in Mongolia's sparse population has risen from 15 to 240. Taiwan, once considered a success story in the fight against the new coronavirus, has recorded more than 1,200 cases since last week and placed more than 600,000 people under lockdown for a fortnight.

**Hong Kong and Singapore have postponed for the second time the resumption of travel between the two countries without quarantine requirements, following an outbreak with uncertain origins in Singapore.**

China, which had virtually eliminated infections, has new cases of COVID-19, apparently due to contact with people who had arrived from abroad.

The situation is affecting efforts to return to social and economic normality in Asia, especially in schools and sectors such as tourism which rely on personal contact.

In Taiwan, the rise in new cases is being caused by the more transmissible variant first identified in the UK, according to Chen Chien-jen, an epidemiologist and former vice-president of the island, who led the much-praised response to the pandemic last year.

In Wanhua, normally a bustling area of Taiwan filled with food stalls, shops and entertainment venues, the Huaxi night market and the Longshan Buddhist temple are closed.

The island has shut down all schools and restrictions have extended to the entire territory: restaurants, gyms and other public places have been closed and gatherings of more than five people indoors and of more than ten people outdoors have been banned.

Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen tried to reassure people who want to move freely again but are now dealing with new lockdown measures. "We will continue to strengthen our medical capacity," Tsai said, adding that vaccines should arrive soon.

Malaysia unexpectedly imposed a one-month lockdown until June 7, after authorities recorded sharp increases in new infections and the emergence of new variants of the virus.

This is the second general lockdown in just over a year after cases quadrupled since January. There are now more than 490,000, including 2,050 deaths.

Travel between Malaysia's various states, as well as social activities, are banned. Schools are closed and restaurants have only home delivery service, as hospitals are almost running out of capacity to receive more COVID-19 patients.

Singapore has set severe social distancing measures until 13 June, restricting public gatherings to two people, and banning dinners at restaurants, following a significant rise in infections with the new coronavirus.

Schools returned to distance learning after students at several institutions became infected.

Hong Kong responded to the new outbreaks by extending the quarantine from 14 to 21 days for unvaccinated travelers arriving from “high-risk” countries, including Singapore, Malaysia and Japan, or Argentina, Italy, the Netherlands, and Kenya.

China has set up checkpoints at airports and railway stations in Liaoning province, where new cases have been reported this week.

Travelers must carry with them a recent negative test for the virus. Mass testing has been required in Yingkou, a port city with sea connections to more than 40 countries.

Thailand records over 30 deaths a day. These are the highest numbers since the health crisis began, bringing the total number of deaths to over 700. The planned reopening of the borders to international tourists may be postponed. Thailand economy forecasts for 2021 were revised. The Kingdom has seen its economy contract by more than 6% in 2020, one of the worst performances in Asia. The authorities are now expecting an increase in the gross domestic product of between 1.5% and 2.5% this year against 2.5% to 3.5% so far.

**In the Philippines, President Rodrigo Duterte has softened measures to fight the pandemic, seeking to tackle the economic crisis and famine.** However, public gatherings remain banned at a time of religious festivities in the country.

COVID-19 infections in the Philippines surged in March, reaching Asia’s worst levels with more than 10,000 new cases a day. Duterte decided to enact a lockdown in Manila in April.

Philippine Health Secretary Francisco Duque said the partial return of economic activities, increased non-compliance with restrictions, and inadequate screening of people exposed to the virus caused the sharp rise in infections.

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