

## Sweden imposes mandatory COVID restrictions, ending its ‘voluntary’ distancing experiment

Like other Europeans, Swedes are now heading into the winter facing restrictions ranging from a ban on large gatherings to curbs on alcohol sales and school closures—all aimed at preventing the country’s health system from being swamped by patients and capping what is already among the highest per capita death tolls in the world.

The clampdown, which started last month, put an end to [a hands-off approach](#) that had made the Scandinavian nation a prime example in the [often heated global debate](#) between opponents and champions of pandemic lockdowns.

Admirers of the Swedish way as far away as the U.S. hailed its benefit to the economy and its respect for fundamental freedoms. Critics called it a gamble with human lives, especially those of the most vulnerable.

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In an emotional televised address on Nov. 22, Prime Minister Stefan Löfven pleaded with Swedes to cancel all nonessential meetings and announced a ban on gatherings of more than eight people, which triggered the closure of cinemas and other entertainment venues. Starting [December 7], high schools will be closed.

“Authorities chose a strategy totally different to the rest of Europe, and because of it the country has suffered a lot in the first wave,” said [physician] Piotr Nowak.

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