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Vienna, January 19 (RHC)-- Austria extends its third hard lockdown until the 7th of February, announcing a new requirement for everyone to use FFP2, or N95 masks in supermarkets and public transport and extending the minimum distance rule from one to two meters.

The announcement comes a day after thousands took to the streets of Vienna protesting the COVID restrictions. The right-wing FPÖ party, which supports the protests expressed anger at the decision, warning that people would no longer understand the necessity for the measures and persist in civil

disobedience.

Officials maintained that they would do the right thing notwithstanding how popular it will be. Studies have now shown that the new virus variant first discovered in the UK, has been in Austria earlier than was initially suspected, currently affecting around ten percent of positive cases.

Austria Health Minister says the country is currently in the most difficult phase of the pandemic and that the situation is very challenging at least for the next ten weeks till the end of March when warmer weather and more vaccinations can help improve the situation. Around 600,000 people are expected to be vaccinated by then.

The goal is to reach a 7-day incidence of 50 new infections per 100,000 people, that number is currently 130. But there's light at the end of the tunnel, Austria's Chancellor says. With the vaccination campaign underway, officials expect things to look more normal in April or at the latest in May.

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