

Vietnam locks down capital Hanoi as COVID-19 infections soar



A near-empty highway in Hanoi on the first day of a government imposed two-week lockdown to stop the spread of COVID-19 [Nhac Nguyen/AFP]

Hanoi, July 25 (RHC)-- Vietnam has imposed a 15-day lockdown in the capital, Hanoi, in an attempt to tackle a surge in coronavirus infections. The lockdown order, which was issued late on Friday, bans the gathering of more than two people in public. Only government offices, hospitals and essential businesses are allowed to stay open.

The center of the normally bustling city of eight million people was empty and shops were shuttered as the lockdown came into force on Saturday, although people could still be seen on the streets in the outskirts of the capital.

"I think people in Hanoi as myself agree with the city's sudden decision of locking down the city," local resident Nguyen Van Chien was quoted as saying by the AFP news agency. "We have to take economic risks to fight the pandemic," he added.

Earlier in the week, authorities had suspended all outdoor activities in Hanoi and ordered non-essential businesses to close following an increase in cases. On Friday, Hanoi reported 70 confirmed infections, the city's highest, part of a record 7,295 cases in the country in the past 24 hours.

Nearly 5,000 of them are from Vietnam's largest metropolis, southern Ho Chi Minh City, which has also extended its lockdown until August 1st. "I have been indoors for a month. The situation in our city is scary," resident Le Bich Thanh told AFP. About a third of Vietnam's 100 million people are already subject to lockdown orders.

In the latest wave of COVID-19 since April, Vietnam has recorded more than 83,000 infections and 335 deaths. A meeting of the National Assembly that opened in Hanoi on Tuesday with 499 delegates is going ahead, although it was shortened to 12 from the original 17 days.

The delegates have been vaccinated, are regularly tested for the coronavirus and are travelling in a bubble, and are isolated at hotels, according to the National Assembly.

Vietnam was one of the few economies that expanded last year due to its success in containing the virus during the first wave of the pandemic. But it has been slow to procure and administer vaccines, with just almost 4.5 million doses given so far. It is also developing its own inoculations and authorities say they hope to reach herd immunity by early 2022.

Vietnam has a policy of hospitalising all virus carriers, putting medical workers and hospitals under huge strain, although the rule has been lifted in some areas.

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