



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on July 30, 2021

## **New South Wales, Australia, Grants More Powers to Police, Deploys Military to Enforce COVID Lockdowns**

Australia's most populous city will undergo another four weeks of lockdown after state officials said previous five-week shutdown orders failed to stem a surge in coronavirus infections, and the city has granted police more powers and even deployed the military to impose lockdown rules.

While Sydney, with six million residents, had planned to exit a prior lockdown by the end of the week, officials instead extended the restrictions into late August on Tuesday, with New South Wales (NSW) Premier Gladys Berejiklian lamenting the decision while claiming it was necessary.



zetter/iStock/Getty Images Plus  
Sydney, Australia

"I am as upset and frustrated as all of you that we were not able to get the case numbers we would have liked at this point in time but that is the reality," she [said](#) during a televised news conference. "We have to deal with the cards before us and the situation before us and that is why we have taken the action we have."

NSW, with a total population of 7.4 million people, of which Sydney is the capital city, reported 177 new infections on Tuesday, slightly up from the 172 reported on Monday. With just over 2,100 "active cases" in the state, NSW's numbers remain low next to comparable regions abroad, though officials there have taken a stricter approach to their pandemic response, looking to prevent any and all new cases. "We want that number to come down to as close to zero, looking at other areas but based on the advice of health, we cannot release any of them," Berejiklian said.

As of 12:01 a.m. on Friday, NSW residents in local government areas (LGAs) of Blacktown, Campbelltown, Canterbury-Bankstown, Cumberland, Fairfield, Georges River, Liverpool, and Parramatta are subject to new harsh [lockdown rules](#) that consider exercise, travel, facemask usage, and shopping.

Residents in those locations are not allowed to leave the area unless they are a critical worker, or seek healthcare or need to provide healthcare. One person per household is allowed to do essential shopping, but must stay within their LGA, and cannot travel further than 10 km (6.2 miles) from home. Otherwise, movement is restricted to 5 km (3.1 miles) from one's home, be it to exercise or for visits.

Masks must be worn whenever outside the home regardless of the proximity to others.

Weddings are banned, and so are community sports. Funerals may be attended by no more than 10 people. Schools will provide virtual education to all grades except for last-year students, who may return to in-person learning in mid-August, but must submit to rapid antigen testing, and student vaccinations in LGAs "of concern." No visitors at home are allowed, except for those living alone, but the guest must live within 5 km, and in the LGA.



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Elsewhere in NSW, no travel to the lockdown zones is generally permitted. Masks must be worn indoors and in some outdoor settings. Also, one may have no more than five guests at home. Restaurants and other hospitality services are limited to seated dining, with no singing or dancing allowed.

The lockdown is expected to last until August 28.

To send the residents a message that no disobedience will be tolerated, authorities have harshened the enforcement. The *DailyMail* [reports](#) that fines for COVID-related rule breakers in NSW have more than doubled, from \$200 to \$500, as “too many people were failing to put [masks] on,” per the outlet.

In addition to that, under the new powers granted to the NSW police commissioner, businesses, construction sites, and public premises can be shut down immediately if they are considered to pose a risk to public health. This would include businesses failing with QR codes and mask wearing, or providing an unsafe environment against other health orders.

Public spaces such as parks could also be cleared out by police if they got too crowded with people not social distancing or wearing masks.

Police have also declared on Friday that they are calling in the military to assist in lockdown enforcement, starting next Monday. Per [Reuters](#), some 300 Australian army personnel will help police go door-to-door contacting people who have tested positive to the virus to ensure they are isolating.

Community groups have criticized both the national and state governments for adopting such a heavy-handed approach. The New South Wales (NSW) Aboriginal Legal Service told the *Guardian* that “Choosing to use force and fear by giving police additional powers and rolling in army troops to communities is disturbing. This will only create greater fear and uncertainty among our families and friends.”

Steve Christou, mayor of the hard-hit Cumberland LGA, [tweeted](#) that the troop deployment was a sign the state government had “lost all control.” Speaking to television channel SBS News, Christou stated, “Our people are one of the poorest demographics, and as it is, they already feel picked on and marginalized.... They can’t afford to pay the mortgage, the rent, the food or work. Now to throw out the army to enforce lockdown on the streets is going to be a huge issue.”

Last week, thousands of people took to the streets of Sydney and other Australian cities [to protest](#) lockdown restrictions, some of the slogans being “This is not about a virus it’s about total government control of the people.”

An emergency COVID cabinet of state and federal leaders meanwhile held a regular meeting on Friday, discussing exit strategies from the pandemic that will be centered around getting more people vaccinated.

Following the meeting, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has [revealed](#) that Australia will reopen its borders and end lockdowns, and also allow its citizens to travel to “safe” countries when 80 percent of the population is fully vaccinated, as he [set out](#) a series of targets for the gradual easing of restrictions.

The strategy states that when 70 percent of eligible adults have received two doses, vaccinated residents will have more freedom from domestic restrictions and a limited number of international students and economic visa holders will be allowed to enter the country.

Per Morrison’s press release, slightly more than 18 percent of Australians aged 16 years and over are now fully vaccinated.



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