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### Eiffel Tower reopens with strict virus restrictions

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Tourists and Parisians will from Thursday again be able to admire the view of the French capital from the Eiffel Tower after a three-month closure due to the coronavirus -- but only if they take the stairs.

Visitors to the city's most famous monument won't be able to take the lifts until July 1, to ensure a safe distance between people to limit infection risk.

The very top of the iconic monument will remain off limits to the public for now.

The 10-tonne metal landmark will emerge from its longest closure since World War II in time for the summer season, but with limited visitor numbers at first, and mandatory face masks for all over the age of 11, said the Eiffel Tower website.

The first visitors will be allowed in from 10:00 am (0800 GMT), a symbolic moment as France begins to tentatively open up to tourism after the virus shutdown.

Eager tourists have been able to grab their tickets since June 18, when the online ticket office opened.

"To ensure that ascending and descending visitors do not meet in the stairs, ascent will take place from the East pillar and descent by the West pillar," said the operator, with a limited number of visitors per floor at a time.

The top level will remain closed for now, "since the lifts taking visitors from second to top floor are small. It might reopen during the summer."

- Gradual return of tourism -

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The statement said ground markings will be put in place to ensure people keep their distance from one another, with "daily cleaning and disinfection of public spaces at the tower."

The monument, completed in 1889, receives about seven million visitors every year, around three-quarters of them from abroad, according to the tower website.

France is one of the world's most visited countries and its tourism industry has taken a hard hit under a lockdown to halt the Covid-19 pandemic, with hotels, restaurants, museums, and theatres closed for three months.

These included some of the French capital's most famous landmarks such as the Louvre museum, due to reopen on July 6, and the Palace of Versailles, which reopened earlier this month.

France lifted restrictions at European borders as of June 15, and the tourism industry hopes that foreign visitors will start pouring in again as the summer season kicks off.

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