

France targets 26 million masks for public this week: ministry

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France plans to have over 26 million non-medical face masks available for purchase by the end of this week as the country prepares to gradually lift its coronavirus lockdown, deputy finance minister Agnes-Pannier

Runacher said Monday.

"With the ramped-up production and increased imports, there will be more than 26 million [masks](#) for the [general public](#), most of which can be reused 20 times, available each week by end-April," Runacher said during a conference call.

Nearly half of the masks, made with washable fabrics, will be made in France by some 240 textile companies that stepped up as officials admitted a shortage of surgical masks for [health workers](#).

The masks will have a number indicating how many times they can be washed before losing their effectiveness.

Runacher added that French production of surgical and the more protective FFP2 or N95 filtering masks has increased to 10 million a week from just 3.5 million before the COVID-19 outbreak in the country in March.

"We are reinforcing the capacities for the four main producers in France with the goal of producing 20 million masks a week by the end of May," she said.

But that would still fall short of the 40 million needed each week by health workers and retirement homes alone during the [coronavirus](#) fight, which prompted the government to place huge orders with Chinese producers.

Significant deliveries are not expected to begin until next month at the earliest.

Runacher said French production of medical-grade masks should reach 50 million a week by October.

President Emmanuel Macron told French mayors last week that masks will only be "recommended" once the lockdown begins to be lifted on May 11, though they will probably be required when using public transport.

Prime Minister Edouard Philippe will present the outlines of the "deconfinement" measures in parliament on Tuesday, possibly including whether masks will be required for students beginning to return to class next month.

But the government has already said that restaurants, cafes and cinemas will remain closed for the time being and large public gatherings such as concerts and sporting events prohibited.

The epidemic has claimed 22,856 lives in France so far, though the number of deaths and hospitalisations has fallen steadily in the past two weeks.

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