

Italy says face masks less important than distancing

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One of Italy's top public health officials warned Monday that wearing face masks should not give people a false sense of security against the new coronavirus.

Italy and other countries are debating whether people should wear masks outdoors at all times—even while not in a confined space.

The Mediterranean country is making the use of face masks mandatory on transport and in stores as it gradually rolls back lockdown measures starting next Monday.

ISS public health institute director Silvio Brusaferrò said [face masks](#) should be worn on the street in cases when it is hard to maintain a [safe distance](#) from others.

But masks "must not give a false sense of security," Brusaferrò told reporters.

"It is an additional element, but [personal hygiene](#) and distancing are more important."

Italy's official death toll from the virus rose Monday by 333 to 26,977—the highest in Europe and second behind the United States.

But both the number of deaths and new daily infections were the lowest in over a month.

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