

Italy mulls new WHO guidelines on virus patient isolation

June 21 2020, by Nicole Winfield



A supporter of Atalanta soccer team wears a face mask in the team's colors, prior to the Serie A soccer match between Atalanta and Sassuolo at the Gewiss Stadium in Bergamo, Italy, Sunday, June 21, 2020. Atalanta is playing its first match in Bergamo since easing of lockdown measures, in the area that has been the epicenter of the hardest-hit province of Italy's hardest-hit region, Lombardy, the site of hundreds of COVID-19 deaths. (AP Photo/Luca Bruno)

Italy's Health Ministry is asking government advisers to evaluate new World Health Organization recommendations saying that people with COVID-19 can come out of isolation before they test negative for the coronavirus.

The WHO last week said patients who spent 10 consecutive days in isolation with symptoms can be released if they are then symptom-free for at least three days. People who don't develop COVID-19 symptoms can stop isolating 10 days after they first test positive, according to WHO's revised guidelines.

Previously, WHO recommended ending the isolation of infected people only after they twice tested negative on samples taken 24 hours apart. The change is significant given that many countries are grappling with how to deal with thousands of people who are technically infected with the [virus](#) but may not still pose a transmission risk to others.

The U.N. health agency said it updated its recommendations because recovered COVID-19 patients were still testing positive for the virus weeks later. Despite their results, "these patients are not likely to be infectious and therefore are unlikely to be able to transmit the virus to another person," WHO said.

Italy, the onetime epicenter of the pandemic in Europe, followed the WHO's previous testing advice, with some people self-isolating even though they felt fine because they kept testing positive for the coronavirus.



Gondolas are lined up during the Vogada della Rinascita (Rowing of Rebirth) regatta, along Venice canals, Italy, Sunday, June 21, 2020. The regatta was an initiative to pay homage to the medical staff and their hard work and contribution during the COVID-19 pandemic. (Anteo Marinoni/LaPresse via AP)

One woman made headlines in Italy because she tested positive six times, over the course of 57 days, even though she said felt fine. But technically speaking, she was required to remain in [isolation](#).

Health Minister Roberto Speranza asked the Italian government's scientific and technical advisory committee Sunday for guidance on the new WHO recommendations, noting they represented a "significant" change to Italy's management of COVID-19 patients.

Speranza said in a statement that the updated advice also could alter how the government counts who has officially recovered from the virus and recommended "maximum precaution."

Anecdotally, doctors have said many of Italy's new confirmed cases are due to people getting tested for the virus after they did blood tests looking for COVID-19 antibodies.



The U.S. ambassador to Italy, Lewis Eisenberg, gives the thumb-up sign as he sits in a gondola during the Vogada della Rinascita (Rowing of Rebirth) regatta, along Venice canals, Italy, Sunday, June 21, 2020. The regatta was an initiative to pay homage to the medical staff and their hard work and contribution during the COVID-19 pandemic. (Anteo Marinoni/LaPresse via AP)

In Italy, those who have developed antibodies are automatically tested specifically for the coronavirus, with some positive results being registered in people who may have been sick much earlier or never felt ill.

Italy on Sunday reported 224 new [coronavirus](#) cases and 24 deaths in the past day, bringing the country's official death toll in the pandemic to 34,634.

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Citation: Italy mulls new WHO guidelines on virus patient isolation (2020, June 21) retrieved 16 August 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-06-italy-mulls-guidelines-virus-patient.html>

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