

Finland reverses policy, recommends mask use

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Finnish health authorities recommended Thursday that people begin wearing masks in public places, after months of claiming there was insufficient evidence to justify their use.

Mika Salminen, director of health security at Finland's public health body THL, said "evidence of masks' effectiveness is not particularly strong" but "even small additions to our range of available options are justified."

After only a trickle at the start of the summer, Finland is now experiencing an increase, with 219 new confirmed coronavirus cases in the last fortnight.

However, the Nordic country still has one of Europe's lowest incidences of the virus according to the WHO.

Earlier in the pandemic, Finnish health authorities rejected the idea of a mask policy, insisting that wearing the face coverings could in fact exacerbate the spread of the virus if they were handled improperly.

At a press conference on Thursday, Salminen defended the earlier decision not to recommend masks, saying: "When masks were discussed in spring, the number of cases was in sharp decline."

While not mandatory, the Finnish recommendations state that masks should be worn on public transport, when travelling to a coronavirus test or other situations where avoiding close personal contact is impossible.

They will not apply to under-15s, nor in areas of the country where there have been no new cases in a fortnight, such as in some vast, rural regions along the Russian border.

Local authorities will organise [masks](#) to be distributed to those who cannot afford them, officials said.

On Monday, ministers announced mandatory [coronavirus](#) testing at some airports and harbours, warning that arrivals from countries not on

Finland's "green list" could face a fine or prison if they refuse to quarantine themselves for 14 days.

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