

Bulgaria makes masks mandatory in busy outdoor spaces

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Bulgaria made mask-wearing mandatory in busy outdoor spaces on Thursday and called on medical students to help shore up its fragile

healthcare system against a burgeoning second coronavirus wave.

Under the new mandate, Bulgarians have to wear masks on busy streets, in markets, trains and metro stations, and while queueing in line—unless they are able to keep a 1.5-metre (five-foot) distance, according to the [health ministry](#).

Bulgaria surpassed 1,000 COVID-19 deaths this week, and had the sixth highest fatality rate in the European Union, according to a seven-day rolling average from the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control.

Infections have meanwhile been skyrocketing in the EU's poorest country.

Health Minister Kostadin Anguelov expressed concern on Thursday about the precarious situation of healthcare workers.

"All are tired, a large part of them are contaminated, sick, some are in intensive care. We need help," he said at a press conference, adding that the government would call on general physicians and final-year [medical students](#) to help out.

More than 1,727 caregivers have contracted the virus since the start of the epidemic, including 45 on Wednesday alone.

On March 8, Bulgaria became one of the first European countries to impose a lockdown, a measure that helped control the epidemic in the spring.

Amid sweeping anti-corruption protests which have rocked the nation of seven million in recent months, restrictions were quickly eased.

Other than general social-distancing guidelines, no restrictions apply to restaurants, nightclubs, or gyms.

The government has not announced any further measures, saying it was trying to limit the impact on people's "[social life](#) and mental health".

There were 1,472 infections recorded in the nation of around seven million on Thursday, bringing its total to 33,335 with 1,048 deaths.

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