

Greece extends coronavirus lockdown by a week

November 26 2020, by Elena Becatoros



Protesters wearing face masks to curb the spread of COVID-19 take part in a rally during a 24-hour strike, on Thursday, Nov. 26, 2020. Civil servants in Greece have walked off the job in a 24-hour strike expected to disrupt public transport and services, on a variety of demands, including better workplace protections against the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Thanassis Stavrakis)

Greece's government spokesman on Thursday announced a weeklong extension to the country's current lockdown, due to the continued spread of the coronavirus, particularly in the north of the country.

Government spokesman Stelios Petas said the lockdown, which was due to end on Nov. 30, would be extended to the morning of Dec. 7.

"The decision is necessary as the epidemiological load continues to be high," Petsas said. "In particular in some areas it is a source of concern."

The announcement came amid a 24-hour strike by civil servants on a variety of demands, including better workplace protections against the coronavirus. The strike disrupted public transport and services, while several hundred people defied a ban on gatherings imposed due to the pandemic, holding protests in Athens and the northern city of Thessaloniki.

Ferries to the islands were halted and the Athens metro system and tram were shut for Thursday's strike, although buses continued to run in the capital. Flights that had been canceled or rescheduled were reinstated, however, as air traffic controllers called off their strike after a court ruled their participation illegal.

Greek journalists were also participating with a two-hour work stoppage between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m., during which no news broadcasts were aired.



A seagull flies as other stand on the rope of a docked ferry at the port of Piraeus, near Athens during a 24-hour strike on Thursday, Nov. 26, 2020. Ferries to the islands were halted and the Athens metro system and tram were shut for Thursday's strike, although buses continued to run in the capital. (AP Photo/Petros Giannakouris)

About 400 people gathered in central Athens for a protest march, defying the ban on gatherings, while about 150 striking workers also gathered briefly for a protest rally in Thessaloniki.

Civil servants unions called the strike on a variety of demands, including the increase of coronavirus-related protective measures in workplaces and in schools, mass hirings in the public transport and health sectors, and salary increases for civil servants.

Public transport workers are also calling for workers to be allowed to undergo tests for COVID-19 at their companies' expense.

Greece has seen a significant surge in coronavirus cases and deaths that is straining the country's health system.

Under the current lockdown measures, all retail stores, bars, restaurants, museums, entertainment venues and gyms are closed. People are only allowed to leave home for specific reasons, including work, health reasons, to buy essential goods, and to exercise or walk a pet, and must send a telephone text message or carry a self-declaration to do so.



A protester holds a banner which reads in Greek "Riot Police (MAT) Everywhere, ICU nowhere", as he participates with others in a motorcycle demonstration, during a 24-hour strike, in Athens, on Thursday, Nov. 26, 2020.

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A man looks in a closed train station in Piraeus , near Athens, during a 24-hour strike on Thursday, Nov. 26, 2020. Ferries to the islands were halted and the Athens metro system and tram were shut for Thursday's strike, although buses continued to run in the capital. (AP Photo/Petros Giannakouris)



A man looks through the shuttered entrance of a metro station in the Egaleo suburb of Athens during a 24-hour strike, on Thursday, Nov. 26, 2020. Civil servants in Greece have walked off the job in a 24-hour strike expected to disrupt public transport and services, on a variety of demands, including better workplace protections against the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Petros Giannakouris)



A woman walks at an iron bridge of the train station of Kallithea , suburb of Athens during a 24-hour strike, on Thursday, Nov. 26, 2020. Civil servants in Greece have walked off the job in a 24-hour strike expected to disrupt public transport and services, on a variety of demands, including better workplace protections against the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Petros Giannakouris)



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Hospital staff wearing face masks to curb the spread of COVID-19 take part in a rally at Evangelismos hospital during a 24-hour strike, on Thursday, Nov. 26, 2020. Civil servants in Greece have walked off the job in a 24-hour strike expected to disrupt public transport and services, on a variety of demands, including better workplace protections against the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Petros Giannakouris)



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However, there are no restrictions on how many times a day people can leave their homes, or for how long. A 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew is in place, during which people can leave their homes only for work, urgent health reasons or to walk a pet.

State-run broadcaster ERT reported that three COVID-19 patients needing intensive care unit facilities were airlifted from northern Greece to Athens Thursday as there were no more available ICU beds in their

areas.

Although the government has carried out mass hirings of medical workers since the pandemic struck and has more than doubled the number of ICU beds in the country since mid-2019, many ICUs, particularly in northern Greece where the outbreak has been most severe, are at or near their capacity. Health authorities have appropriated two private clinics in the northern city of Thessaloniki and their staff, to be used for coronavirus patients.

Greece has so far registered more than 97,000 confirmed coronavirus cases and just over 1,900 deaths in this country of 11 million. Nearly 600 people are intubated in ICUs nationwide, according to figures released Wednesday evening.

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