

Travelers to Spain must provide negative COVID-19 test

November 11 2020, by Joseph Wilson



People wearing a face masks to prevent the spread of coronavirus make exercise at the Retiro park in Madrid, Spain, Thursday, Nov. 11, 2020. Spain's health ministry is reporting 411 more fatalities for the coronavirus on Tuesday, a new daily record since contagion started picking up pace this summer. (AP Photo/Manu Fernandez)

Travelers bound for Spain from countries considered high-risk areas for the coronavirus will be asked to provide proof of a negative test to visit the European country, authorities said Wednesday.

Starting Nov. 23, travelers to Spain will be required to submit a negative test result from within 72 hours prior to their planned departure. They will be able to do so via the internet, a smartphone application, or with a document before boarding a plane or boat.

The proof of being virus-free before traveling will come on top of the temperature checks performed on arriving passengers at Spain's airports and ports. The measure will apply to countries designated as "high risk."

The European Union considers member nations to be high-risk zones if either their 14-day cumulative case notification rate is 50 or more and the positive test rate for COVID-19 is 4% or more, or if their 14-day cumulative case notification rate is more than 150 per 100,000 inhabitants.

For non-EU countries and European nations within the visa-free Schengen travel area, Spain considers those with an accumulated 150 cases per 100,000 inhabitants over 14 days.

Health minister Salvador Illa said the government took the measure in line with guidelines established by the EU last month. He said that EU members had opted for the use of "diagnostic tests and not quarantines" to enable safe travel inside the bloc.

Spain's robust tourism industry, a pillar of its economy, has taken a huge hit due to fears and restrictions caused by the virus.

Madrid's regional authorities, which have been asking for tighter controls for the capital's airport, celebrated the decision it had been

demanding for months.

However, the number of imported coronavirus cases to Spain has been negligible, according to Illa.

Spain's strict lockdown in the spring reined in its first national outbreak, but it did not completely eliminate the virus from the population. The virus rebounded when Spain reactivated its economic and social life in the summer, forcing a new round of restrictions, including nationwide nightly curfew to be applied in recent weeks.

Like most of Europe, Spain is struggling to contain a resurgence of virus infections. Spain has surpassed 40,000 confirmed deaths from COVID-19 after another 349 fatalities were reported by health officials on Wednesday.

Still, Illa tried to offer some hope while emphasizing the need for vigilance.

"We continue to show a downward tendency (of the contagion spread), but it is still very worrying, with high levels of hospitalizations and high level of ICU occupancy," Illa said.

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