

Dutch mask-wearing rule becomes law

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A law making it compulsory to wear masks in indoor public spaces finally came into effect in the Netherlands on Tuesday, making it one of the last countries in Europe to do so.

Prime Minister Mark Rutte told citizens aged over 13 to wear face coverings back in October as part of a "partial lockdown", but the law

did not come into effect until now.

People breaching the law risk a fine of 95 euros. The fine for under 16s is 38 euros.

The law covers shops, public parts of government buildings and schools, and museums. Contact professions including hairdressers and driving instructors also have to wear [masks](#).

However sex workers—prostitution is legal in the Netherlands—and their clients are allowed to take them off.

The Netherlands until recently had some of the most relaxed [coronavirus](#) rules in Europe, with Rutte refusing to even advise the wearing of masks until September.

It has taken until now for the law to come into effect because of issues in drafting the legal basis for compulsory mask wearing, and for it to go through parliament.

The Dutch government for months opted for what Rutte called an "intelligent lockdown" policy that was far more relaxed than in European neighbours.

But it has scrambled to control the [second wave](#), with cases at one point among the highest in Europe.

Dutch Health Minister Hugo de Jonge said on Tuesday that the country aimed to start vaccinations in the week of January 4, if the EU medicines agency approves the first vaccines by then.

"But here's a word of caution: this really is the most favourable scenario," he said, adding that "safety comes before speed".

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