

Greece to reopen schools using self-test kits for COVID-19

April 7 2021, by Elena Becatoros



A woman wearing a face mask to protect from the spread of coronavirus, stands in front of a graffiti by the Greek artist Achilles in Athens, Tuesday, April 6, 2021. Lockdown measures have been in force since early November but an ongoing surge in COVID-19 infections remains high as the country battles to emerge from deep recession. (AP Photo/Thanassis Stavrakis)

Kits for self-administered coronavirus tests began arriving in Greek pharmacies Wednesday, with residents entitled to one a week free of charge as part of efforts to tackle a surge of coronavirus cases and hospitalizations.

Priority for the home tests is initially being given to teachers and high school students aged 16-18, as authorities announced plans to reopen high schools for students in the final three grades starting April 12. Students and teachers returning to school will be required to use the test kits twice weekly.

Greece has been under lockdown-type restrictions since early November and schools have been shut for most of the time since then, although they briefly reopened for a few weeks earlier this year. Only special education schools have remained open throughout.

Despite restrictions on movement and gatherings and the closures of bars, restaurants and retail stores for months, coronavirus cases have been surging in Greece. Hospitals are under strain and many intensive care units are at capacity. The country of 11 million people announced a record number of daily new infections Tuesday with 4,309, while the cumulative death toll stood at 8,607 on Wednesday.

Despite the surge, retail stores in most of the country reopened Monday on an appointment-only basis. Cafes, restaurants and bars remain shut and are allowed to operate on a takeout or delivery basis only, while a 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew remains in place and people are allowed to leave home only for specific reasons and after sending a text message to authorities or carrying a self-declaration form. Masks are compulsory in all public indoor and outdoor areas.



Ambulances are parked at Evangelismos hospital, one of the main public hospital used for treatment of coronavirus cases in Athens, Tuesday, April 6, 2021. Lockdown measures have been in force since early November but an ongoing surge in COVID-19 infections remains high as the country battles to emerge from deep recession. (AP Photo/Thanassis Stavrakis)



Two young women wearing face mask to protect from the spread of coronavirus, walk with their bicycles on Ermou Street, Athens' main shopping area, Tuesday, April 6, 2021. Lockdown measures have been in force since early November but an ongoing surge in COVID-19 infections remains high as the country battles to emerge from deep recession. (AP Photo/Thanassis Stavrakis)



People wearing protective face masks walk in front the Gate of the ancient Roman agora, in Plaka, district of Athens, on Tuesday, April 6, 2021. Lockdown measures have been in force since early November but an ongoing surge in COVID-19 infections remains high as the country battles to emerge from deep recession. (AP Photo/Petros Giannakouris)



A woman wearing a protective face mask closes a clothes store in Monastiraki, district of Athens, on Tuesday, April 6, 2021. Lockdown measures have been in force since early November but an ongoing surge in COVID-19 infections remains high as the country battles to emerge from deep recession. (AP Photo/Petros Giannakouris)

But after five months of restrictions, many are openly flouted and crowds outside cafes and bars serving drinks in plastic cups have become common in the evenings.

Alternate Health Minister Vassilis Koutzoumpanis said distribution of the test kits to the population would begin on Thursday.

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