

# Greece mandates COVID-19 vaccinations for residents over 60

November 30 2021

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Commuters wearing face masks to curb the spread of COVID-19 are seen in a bus, in Athens, Greece, Tuesday, Nov. 9, 2021. Greece reported a new record high for daily COVID-19 infections on Monday as vaccination appointments shot up after new restrictions on unvaccinated people kicked in over the weekend. Credit: AP Photo/Michael Varaklas

Residents in Greece over 60 years old will have to undergo mandatory vaccinations against coronavirus or face monthly 100-euro (\$114) fines beginning next year, the prime minister announced Tuesday, declaring the country's first general inoculation mandate.

The Greek government decided upon the measure in response to a surge in new daily infections and the emergence of the omicron variant. It will take effect on Jan. 16 and the fines will be added to tax bills, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said in a televised statement.

Greece's overall COVID-19 death toll exceeded 18,000 this week with confirmed new infections at high levels. Roughly a quarter of the country's adult population remains unvaccinated.

Vaccination mandates were introduced over the summer for health care workers and fire service rescuers in Greece, with those failing to comply being suspended from their jobs indefinitely without pay.

The government has ruled out imposing new lockdowns but says it is targeting the elderly with tougher restrictions to protect the public health service as ICU occupancy is near capacity nationwide.

"The new omicron variant is a concern for us and means we must be vigilant," Mitsotakis said.

"Unfortunately, of the 580,000 unvaccinated of our fellow citizens over the age of 60, only 60,000 set up appointments to get vaccinated in November," he said. "But it is mainly people over 60 who require hospital treatment and sadly lose their life. These deaths are unnecessary."



A woman adjusts her face mask as she passes a Christmas decorated shop front window in Athens, Greece, Monday, Nov. 29, 2021. Greece has recorded a spike in deaths and infections related to COVID-19 this month, amid heightened concerns in Europe due to the Omicron variant. The Greek government has ruling out the prospect of a general lockdown. Credit: AP Photo/Thanassis Stavrakis



Pedestrians, some of them wearing face masks to protect against coronavirus, cross a road at Syntagma square in Athens, Greece, Monday, Nov. 29, 2021. Greece has recorded a spike in deaths and infections related to COVID-19 this month, amid heightened concerns in Europe due to the Omicron variant. The Greek government has ruling out the prospect of a general lockdown. Credit: AP Photo/Thanassis Stavrakis



A man wearing a face mask to protect against coronavirus walks in Athens, Greece, Monday, Nov. 29, 2021. Greece has recorded a spike in deaths and infections related to COVID-19 this month, amid heightened concerns in Europe due to the Omicron variant. The Greek government has ruling out the prospect of a general lockdown. Credit: AP Photo/Thanassis Stavrakis

The opposition left-wing Syriza party accused the center-right government of shifting the responsibility of battling the virus onto ordinary Greeks and "targeting people over 60 ... with punitive and financially debilitating measures that haven't been implemented anywhere else in the world."

Development Minister Adonis Georgiadis conceded that it had been a "politically difficult decision," but defended the measure as the only way

forward.

"If we chose the easy path we would say: 'It's their problem,'" he said in parliament. "(Unvaccinated people over 60) wouldn't get inoculated, they would die in their thousands and we would wash our hands of them so as not to lose votes. That is an immoral course of action."

No details were provided on how Greek authorities would be able to establish whether people over 60 have been vaccinated. One possible way could be to cross-check with government social security databases, although this would require notifying the independent data protection agency and potentially passing special legislation to do that.

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