

Greece approves mandatory vaccination for those aged over 60

December 1 2021, by Nicholas Paphitis



A man wearing a face mask to protect against coronavirus, walks in front of the Christmas tree at Syntagma square in Athens, Greece, Wednesday, Dec. 1, 2021. 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. Credit: AP Photo/Thanassis Stavrakis

Greek lawmakers on Wednesday approved legislation making vaccination for COVID-19 mandatory for all residents aged over 60, to deal with an infection surge and the emergence of the omicron variant.

The draft law backed by the center-right government and a center-left opposition party—but rejected by all other opposition parties—targets the country's age group that is most vulnerable to death or intubation from the coronavirus.

Some 17% of Greeks aged over 60 have not yet been vaccinated. They have until Jan. 16 to get their first jabs, or will be fined 100 euros (\$113) for every month they remain unvaccinated.

Parties that opposed the measure said it was too harsh on low-income people who don't want to be inoculated.

Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said he reluctantly proposed the measure due to "implacable" facts: Nine in 10 Greeks who die of COVID-19 are aged over 60; Seven in 10 intubated patients in intensive care units belong to the same age group, and more than eight in 10 of those have not been vaccinated.

Mitsotakis said during the debate that the 17% of unvaccinated people over 60 "is too big a percentage to ignore."

"It is beyond doubt that these are the people who face the highest risk," he said. "But it's also they who, being unprotected, are besieging the public health system, depriving treatment from thousands of other people with very serious health issues."



Healthcare workers shout slogans during a rally organized by their unions in Athens, Greece, Wednesday, Dec. 1, 2021. State hospital workers marched through central Athens as part of a 24-hour strike to protest staff shortages and compulsory vaccinations against COVID-19, including the recognition of coronavirus deaths as a labor accident. Credit: AP Photo/Thanassis Stavrakis

Last month the government tightened restrictions for the unvaccinated, mandating tests for all non-essential shops, services and venues, including outdoor cafes. Officials say that has spurred a vaccination surge – but not among those over 60.

Mitsotakis said almost 2 million vaccination appointments were made over the past three weeks. But out of the 580,000 unvaccinated people older than 60, only 70,000 made a first jab appointment.

"I don't care whether the measure will cost me some extra votes in the elections," Mitsotakis said. "I am convinced that we are doing the right thing and I am convinced that this policy will save lives."

The mandatory vaccination will not apply to people who have recovered from COVID-19 in the past six months, or who have serious health issues—such as autism or epilepsy. The fines will be added to tax bills following cross-reference with state social security databases, and will be ploughed into the state national health system.



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The country of nearly 11 million has so far registered more than 18,000 deaths and nearly 950,000 infections from the virus—none, so far, from the omicron variant. Roughly a quarter of the adult population remains unvaccinated.

The government has ruled out a new general lockdown. Greece imposed vaccination mandates over the summer for health care workers and fire service rescuers, with those failing to comply being suspended from their jobs indefinitely without pay.

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