

Spain to drop masks outdoors as omicron surge decelerates

February 4 2022



A man and woman wearing FFP2 masks to curb the spread of COVID-19 are seen in front of a mural depicting Santa Claus, in Madrid, Spain, on Jan. 12, 2022. Spain will end a mandate to wear masks outdoors next week, reverting a late December order against an unprecedented surge of coronavirus infections fueled by a highly contagious mutation. Credit: AP Photo/Manu Fernandez, File

Spain will end a mandate to wear masks outdoors next week, reversing a late December order against an unprecedented surge of coronavirus infections fueled by a highly contagious mutation, Health Minister Carolina Darias said.

After confirming that contagion levels have peaked, the Spanish Cabinet will end the mandate next Tuesday and the government expects the changes to be adopted from Thursday, Feb. 10, Darias told Cadena SER radio on Friday.

Mask wearing will remain mandatory in indoor public spaces, including public transportation, and outdoors whenever citizens can't keep a [safe distance](#) of 1.5 meters between them.

The outdoor mandate, adopted on Dec. 22 as many were preparing to reunite with loved ones on Christmas, was the government's main response to the spread of omicron.

The decision was criticized by some experts as a cosmetic move that had little effect in halting [contagion](#).

Official health ministry data shows how the spread of the virus gained speed in November and peaked on Jan. 21 at 3,418 new infections per 100,000 residents in two weeks, a pandemic record. Contagion has since slowed down and the 14-day figure dropped by 1,000 infections per 100,000 residents on Thursday, to 2,420.

Authorities credit a strong vaccination rate of nearly 81% of the 47 million population for a lower admission rate of people with COVID-19 in hospitals than in previous [infection](#) surges.

Spain has officially recorded just over 94,000 deaths linked to COVID-19.

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Citation: Spain to drop masks outdoors as omicron surge decelerates (2022, February 4) retrieved 27 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-02-spain-masks-outdoors-omicron-surge.html>

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