

Italy easing COVID rules on quarantine, masks, vaccination

March 17 2022, by Frances D'emilio



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Italy, where the COVID-19 pandemic first erupted in the West in February 2020, is easing many restrictions over the coming weeks, including requirements for most workplace vaccination and mask-wearing.

Health Minister Roberto Speranza told reporters after a Cabinet meeting

on Thursday that quarantine will no longer be required for those coming in contact with someone testing positive for the coronavirus. That's especially good news for children, he noted, since they will be able to keep attending school in case of a positive-testing classmate.

But people testing positive will still be required to isolate.

With the easing of Italy's rules, workers older than 50 will no longer risk suspension from work if they aren't vaccinated. Instead, through April, unvaccinated older workers will be able to access workplaces if they test negative.

However, [health care workers](#), and those employed in nursing homes, regardless of age, will still be required to be vaccinated through the end of 2022.

Masks will still be required through April 30 for indoor venues like restaurants, gyms, pools, theaters and discos, as well as workplaces.

Italy earlier this year lifted its requirement for mask-wearing outdoors.

Soon, seating capacity in stadiums for sports events and concerts will return to 100%.

But Premier Mario Draghi cautioned the country that if necessary, restrictions could return in the case of a new surge in COVID-19 infections.

"At today's Cabinet meeting, we took fundamental steps toward reopening" the country, Draghi said. "But naturally we are observing with great attention how the epidemiological curve is going, and we're ready to adapt " if necessary with stricter measures.

After steadily dropping in recent weeks, the daily number of confirmed COVID-19 cases and the positivity rate of swab tests have started to rise in the last few days. That's similar to what's happening in other western European nations lately. In Germany, where many pandemic restrictions expire at the weekend, the country [hit a new record high Thursday](#) for newly confirmed cases.

Experts say Italy's current rise in confirmed cases is still under study, but the highly transmissible omicron subvariant known as BA.2 is suspected.

In measure of confidence that the worst of the virus outbreak has passed, the Italian government also decided not to renew a national state of emergency regarding the pandemic, after the current emergency decree expires on March 31.

In the first months of the pandemic, Italy imposed one of the harshest nationwide lockdowns. Draghi thanked Italians for their "patience" as well as for their "altruism" in being vaccinated.

Nearly 90% of Italians 12 or older have completed the vaccine cycle, and one-third of children aged 5 through 12 have also been fully vaccinated. In addition, some 38 million of Italy's nearly 59 million residents have gotten booster shots.

"We're always perceived of abroad as a people who lack civic sense, well, it's not true," Draghi said. "We have one of the highest vaccination rates in Europe."

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