

South Korea to relax outdoor mask mandate as COVID-19 slows

April 29 2022, by Kim Tong-Hyung



A man wearing a face mask to help curb the spread of the coronavirus sits on a bench while maintaining social distancing at a park in Seoul, South Korea, Friday, April 29, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Lee Jin-man

South Korea will ease its outdoor mask mandate starting next week as COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations continue to decline.

Starting Monday, people will only be required to wear a mask outdoors when participating in gatherings of more than 50 people or attending sports and cultural events with potentially large crowds, health authorities said in a briefing Friday. The mask mandate for indoors and [public transport](#) will also remain in place.

Health workers have diagnosed a daily average of around 63,000 new cases in the past seven days, including 50,568 in the latest 24 hours—a drop-off from mid-March when the country was reporting hundreds of thousands of infections each day at [the height of an omicron-driven surge](#). As hospitalizations and deaths slow, less than 30% of the country's 2,800 intensive care units designated for COVID-19 patients are occupied.

South Korea had already removed much of its pandemic restrictions earlier this month, including a 10-person limit on private social gatherings, a midnight curfew at restaurants, [coffee shops](#) and bars and a ban on [food consumption](#) at [movie theaters](#), [concert halls](#) and indoor sports venues.



A man wearing a face mask to help curb the spread of the coronavirus is silhouetted in Goyang, South Korea, Friday, April 29, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Lee Jin-man



A woman wearing a face mask to help curb the spread of the coronavirus passes by a sign reminding the precautions to take against the coronavirus at a park in Seoul, South Korea, Friday, April 29, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Lee Jin-man



A man wearing a face mask to help curb the spread of the coronavirus passes by a sign reminding the precautions to take against the coronavirus at a park in Seoul, South Korea, Friday, April 29, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Lee Jin-man



People wearing face masks to help curb the spread of the coronavirus ride an escalator in Seoul, South Korea, Friday, April 29, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Lee Jin-man



A woman wearing a face mask to help curb the spread of the coronavirus walks near the flowers at a park in Seoul, South Korea, Friday, April 29, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Lee Jin-man



People wearing face masks pass by a poster reminding precautions against the coronavirus at a subway station in Seoul, South Korea, Friday, April 29, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon



People wearing face masks pass by a poster reminding precautions against the coronavirus at a subway station in Seoul, South Korea, Friday, April 29, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon



A woman wearing a face mask to help curb the spread of the coronavirus cleans an escalator at a park in Seoul, South Korea, Friday, April 29, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Lee Jin-man

Jeong Eun-kyeong, commissioner of the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency, said the weeklong decline in infections even with the easing of social distancing suggests that the country's outbreak is stabilizing. She said [health authorities](#) concluded it was safe to relax the mask mandate because the risk of transmissions is much lower outdoors and other countries didn't see a meaningful increase in infections after easing similar restrictions.

Jeong recommended that people still wear masks outdoors if they have symptoms like coughs or fever or are in crowded spaces like theme

parks where it's hard for them to maintain at least a meter (3-foot) distance with others.

However, the office of President-elect Yoon Suk Yeol, who takes office in May 10, raised concern that the move to ease the mask mandate could be premature. Hong Kyung-hee, spokesperson of Yoon's presidential transition committee, said the committee had recommended the government to monitor virus trends for at least another month before deciding whether to relax the mask mandate.

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