

Spain says masks no longer totally obligatory indoors

April 20 2022, by Ciarán Giles



People wait with masks to protect against the spread of coronavirus before boarding a bus in Madrid, Spain, Wednesday, April 20, 2022. Spain is taking another step toward post-pandemic normality by partially ending the obligatory use of masks indoors. A government decree taking effect Wednesday keeps masks still mandatory in medical centers and in all forms of public transport. Credit: AP Photo/Paul White

Spain took another step Wednesday toward a sense of normality amid the pandemic by partially ending the near two-year-long obligatory use of masks indoors.

The government decree, passed Tuesday, keeps masks mandatory for visitors and staff in medical centers and nursing homes, although patients won't always be obliged to wear them.

Masks will also be mandatory on all forms of public transportation, but not in stations or airports.

It remains unclear what impact the decree will have on workplaces such as public and private company offices, banks, factories and stores as the government is letting employers decide to keep them in use if they deem there is a health risk.

In turn, they are recommended, but not obligatory, in multitudinous gatherings, in packed areas or in the presence of vulnerable people. Schools are also exempted from having to use them.

Masks became obligatory indoors and outdoors shortly after the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in Spain early 2020. The restriction for outdoor use was lifted in mid-2021, but reimposed between December and February amid a major surge of infections of the highly contagious omicron variant.

"The mask without doubt has been one of the most identifiable measures over the past two years and it will no longer be obligatory," Health Minister Carolina Darias said Tuesday. "They will continue to be with us as an element of protection, particularly for the most vulnerable."



A man puts on his mask to protect against the spread of COVID-19 before boarding a bus in Madrid, Spain, Wednesday, April 20, 2022. Spain is taking another step toward post-pandemic normality by partially ending the obligatory use of masks indoors. A government decree taking effect Wednesday keeps masks still mandatory in medical centers and in all forms of public transport. Credit: AP Photo/Paul White

With more than 92% of Spaniards over 12 years old having received at least two vaccine doses and the number of coronavirus infections and deaths dropping sharply in recent months, Spain has also eliminated mandatory home isolation for people infected with the virus who experience no symptoms or mild ones.

The ebbing of the pandemic comes as Spanish prosecutors turn their

attention to possible illegalities in the purchasing of masks and other [medical products](#) by authorities in the critical first few months of the outbreak.

Two of the most prominent cases involve the Madrid region and the capital city's [town hall](#).

State prosecutors are investigating two men who they say pocketed more than 6 million euros (\$6.5 million) in commission by selling masks and other products to Madrid city hall at exorbitantly inflated prices. Prosecutors say the two bought [luxury cars](#), watches and even a yacht with the money.

Meanwhile, Spanish and European prosecutors have also been looking into the purchase of masks by the the Madrid regional government in a deal brokered by the brother of regional president Isabel Díaz Ayuso for a substantial commission.



A woman carries her mask to protect against the spread of COVID-19 as she comes out of a subway station in Madrid, Spain, Wednesday, April 20, 2022. Spain is taking another step toward post-pandemic normality by partially ending the obligatory use of masks indoors. A government decree taking effect Wednesday keeps masks still mandatory in medical centers and in all forms of public transport. Credit: AP Photo/Paul White

In both cases, authorities say they acted in [good faith](#) during a [national emergency](#) and that it was extremely difficult to obtain these products at the beginning of the pandemic.

Meanwhile, analyzing the books of Spain's major cities and some major institutions during the first three months of the [pandemic](#), Spain's Court of Auditors has found that there were often major exorbitant differences

in the prices paid for masks and other products.

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Citation: Spain says masks no longer totally obligatory indoors (2022, April 20) retrieved 27 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-04-spain-masks-longer-totally-obligatory.html>

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