

Italy needs 10 million masks to fight virus: official

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Italy, which does not make face masks, is getting 800,000 of them from South Africa but needs at least 10 million more, a top Italian civil protection official told AFP on Tuesday.

"We received 400,000 from South Africa (on Monday) and will receive as many" on Wednesday, Civil Protection Department director Luigi D'Angelo said in a [telephone interview](#).

He said the supplies are being delivered to Rome's Fiumicino airport and then distributed across Italy, which has recorded 79 deaths and more than 2,500 virus cases since February 22—the most in Europe by far.

D'Angelo said Italy needed "eight million surgical [masks](#)", which should be used either by those suffering from the virus or those who have been in contact with [sick people](#).

Italy will also need "several million FFP2 and FFP3 masks to be used by health operators who are in direct contact with patients," the civil protection agency chief said.

The white FFP2 and FFP3 masks offer much more protection than regular [surgical masks](#)—usually green and seen widely on the streets.

No mask should worn for more than six hours, D'Angelo stressed.

Italian hospitals had initial supplies but the rapid spread of the epidemic has put the health system under strain, D'Angelo explained.

He said some hospitals were "running out of supplies", adding that Italy's worst affected region, Lombardy, was using up 200,000 masks a day.

Lombardy has recorded 55 deaths and 1,520 cases in all, officials said Tuesday.

Italy has also approached other mask-manufacturing countries, including Romania, Switzerland and the Netherlands, D'Angelo said.

The civil protection service recommends home quarantine for people with slight symptoms or those without any but who have been in contact with infected patients.

But "this requires having your own bedroom and bathroom," he stressed.

His agency has already set up military-style barracks near Rome and Turin, and will set up more near Milan to help quarantine people, he said.

Prison and hospital tents

Civil protection authorities are also setting set up tents in front of some hospitals to make sure suspected cases do not come into contact with other patients, D'Angelo said.

"We have set up 330-350 pre-sorting tents in front of hospitals emergency (departments) and 130 in front of prisons to keep them from turning into hotbeds of the epidemic," he said.

This is primarily aimed at avoiding the experience Italy had with the so-called "patient one", who involuntarily spread the virus on its initial arrival in the country.

He had been treated for severe pneumonia in [hospital](#) without being separated from other patients.

D'Angelo added that the military has been supplied with additional beds and medical staff.

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