Medical Xpress

Sweden offers free virus testing for all with symptoms

June 4 2020

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Sweden on Thursday said it would provide free testing for anyone showing coronavirus symptoms and conduct contact tracing for those who are infected.

The announcement came as the country said it would also allow domestic travel across the country, almost three months after it was discouraged in line with anti-virus measures.

The aim of the new testing program is to control infection rates in the country, which did not impose strict lockdown measures like many of its European neighbours.

The government said it would dedicate 5.9 billion Swedish kronor ($640 million), in addition to a billion kroner already promised, to cover the costs of testing and contact tracing.

"From now on, everyone with symptoms will be able to test themselves for COVID-19 free of cost," Minister for Financial Markets Per Bolund told reporters.

Both tests to screen for active infections and serological tests to discover previous infections would be made widely available.

Sweden has reported nearly 42,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and more than 4,500 deaths, according to the latest figures Thursday.

The government also said that as of June 13 Swedes without coronavirus symptoms would be able to travel freely inside the country—though must adhere to social distancing recommendations.

"The situation is still serious. This announcement doesn't mean that the danger has passed. It doesn't mean life returns to normal," Prime Minister Stefan Lofven said.

The government discouraged all unnecessary travel in March, but last month eased up and advised Swedes to travel only about one or two hours from home.

Sweden has urged people to follow official recommendations and behave responsibly instead of rolling out strict lockdowns.

With the exception of a ban on public gatherings of more than 50 people and visits to nursing homes, most measures have not been legally binding.

The country's leaders have repeatedly stressed that the measures are designed for the long haul, and that the fight against the virus is a "marathon, not a sprint".

But their approach has been criticised at home and abroad, particularly as deaths exceeded those in neighbouring Nordic countries, which all imposed stricter measures.

This week, state epidemiologist Anders Tegnell admitted there was room for improvement in the country's approach, and that the death rate was too high.

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Citation: Sweden offers free virus testing for all with symptoms (2020, June 4) retrieved 26 April 2024 from https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-06-sweden-free-virus-symptoms.html

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