Turkey makes masks mandatory in Istanbul, 46 other provinces

June 18 2020

People wearing face masks to protect against the spread of coronavirus, walk in the main Kizilay Square, in Ankara, Turkey, Tuesday, June 16, 2020. Turkey has made the wearing of face masks mandatory in five more provinces, following an uptick in COVID-19 cases. Health Minister Fahrettin Koca tweeted early Tuesday that the wearing of masks is now compulsory in 42 of Turkey's 81 provinces.(AP Photo/Burhan Ozbilici)

Turkish authorities have made the wearing of masks mandatory in three major cities to curb the spread of COVID-19 following an uptick in confirmed cases since the reopening of many businesses.

The governors of Istanbul, Ankara and Bursa announced the mask rule late Wednesday in line with a recommendation by the country's scientific advisory council. Masks are now obligatory in 47 out of 81 provinces. The statements said masks would be worn in all public spaces.

Turkey is seeing an upward trend in the daily number of infections after the government authorized cafes, restaurants, gyms, parks, beaches and museums to reopen, lifted travel restrictions between cities and eased stay-at-home orders for the elderly and young at the start of June.

On Thursday, the interior ministry announced lockdowns for several hours Saturday and next weekend across Turkey while millions of students take high school and university entrance exams. Health Minister Fahrettin Koca tweeted the "limited" curfew would be in place to prevent crowds.

Worried parents and students have asked for the exams to be postponed amid the pandemic.

The education minister said masks and disinfectants have been placed in schools, while the exam rooms have been disinfected and set up in line with social distancing guidelines.

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A Turkish man walks in a public garden, in Ankara, Turkey, Tuesday, June 16, 2020. Turkey has made the wearing of face masks mandatory in five more provinces, following an uptick in COVID-19 cases. Health Minister Fahrettin Koca tweeted early Tuesday that the wearing of masks is now compulsory in 42 of Turkey's 81 provinces.(AP Photo/Burhan Ozbilici)

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The health minister announced Wednesday that confirmed daily infections were around 653 in the past month in Istanbul, Turkey's most populous city with more than 15 million residents, and noted that the daily average fell to 616 in the past three days.

In the capital, Ankara, the range in one month has been between 127 and 177 new infections per day with an uptick in the past week.

Turkey has reported more than 184,000 confirmed cases and 4,882

deaths from COVID-19 since March, including 21 deaths and 1,304 new infections in the past 24 hours. The latest numbers show an increase in the number of people needing intensive care and who are intubated.

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