

Brussels to relax compulsory mask rule from October 1

23 September 2020



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Residents of the Belgian capital will no longer be obliged to wear anti-coronavirus facemasks in public from October 1, the regional government said on Wednesday.

Brussels, home to the headquarters of NATO and the European Union, imposed one of the world's strictest mask orders on August 12 and officials said it would be "strongly recommended" that people continue to wear them even after they are lifted.

The announcement came after Prime Minister Sophie Wilmes said she would ease some anti-COVID restrictions, despite a worrying increase in cases, in order to ensure long term [public support](#).

"The virus is still there but life must continue," Wilmes told a news conference after a meeting of the National Security Council.

"Wearing a mask is very important in managing the epidemic. Nevertheless it is useless to impose it everywhere, all the time."

She invited [local authorities](#) not to make face

covering mandatory everywhere, but to limit it to closed [public places](#), public transport and shopping areas.

Wilmes also announced that the isolation period imposed in case of close contact with a person contaminated by the [coronavirus](#) would be reduced from 14 to seven days.

Previously, Belgian households were required to limit close contacts to a "social bubble" of five people, now each household member can choose five contacts for a month and a family can host occasional events such as dinner parties for up to ten.

Public events are limited to 200 people indoors and 400 outdoors.

Soon a "barometer of the epidemic" will be published to guide local restrictions, depending on the speed of viral spread.

In Belgium, population 11.5 million, the authorities had recorded by Wednesday 105,226 cases of COVID-19 and 9,955 deaths, one of the highest mortality rates in Europe.

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APA citation: Brussels to relax compulsory mask rule from October 1 (2020, September 23) retrieved 18 January 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-09-brussels-compulsory-mask-october.html>

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