

Greece announces new restrictions for those not vaccinated

24 August 2021, by Elena Becatoros



Commuters exit from Syntagma Metro station in Athens, Tuesday, Aug. 24, 2021. Greece's health minister is announcing new measures for the non-vaccinated, as the number of COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations continue to rise. Credit: AP Photo/Thanassis Stavrakis

Greece's health minister announced plans on Tuesday to impose new testing requirements and attendance restrictions on people who aren't vaccinated against COVID-19.

The measures include requiring weekly or twice-weekly testing for unvaccinated workers, and allowing access to certain indoor venues only to those who are vaccinated or have a certificate verifying they have recovered from COVID-19 in the last six months.

Health Minister Vassilis Kikilias said the new measures weren't punitive, but "what we must do as a responsible state."

"It is our obligation toward all those who lost the battle" before vaccines became available, Kikilias said.

"It is our obligation towards the millions of citizens

who spent 18 months of the pandemic being careful for themselves and their fellow citizens, who stayed up nights for weeks caring for patients, who shut their shops and lost their jobs in this huge pandemic, who worked remotely, who studied remotely," he said.

The measures will be in effect from Sept. 13 until March 31. Under the new regulations, all private and public sector workers without a certificate proving vaccination or recent recovery from COVID-19 will have to undergo one rapid test per week, Kikilias said.



A woman wearing a face mask and gloves walks on Ermou Street, Athens' main shopping, Tuesday, Aug. 24, 2021. Greece's health minister is announcing new measures for the non-vaccinated, as the number of COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations continue to rise. Credit: AP Photo/Thanassis Stavrakis

Two tests per week will be required for people working in academia, tourism, restaurants, cafes, bars, and in entertainment productions, as well as school and [university students](#).

The tests will be conducted at private facilities, with

the 10-euro cost to be paid by the tested individuals. Only [school students](#) will be eligible for free tests.

Stressing that more than 90% of the COVID-19 patients in Greece's intensive care units are unvaccinated, Kikilias said indoor entertainment venues, restaurants, bars and cafes will only be accessible to vaccinated or recently recovered customers, with verification checks conducted at entrances through an app that scans COVID-19 certificates.

Unvaccinated people will be able to enter indoor movies, theaters, museums, archaeological sites and gyms only with proof of a negative rapid test conducted up to 48 hours earlier. Venues will have the right to admit only vaccinated customers if they wish, the minister said.

Masks will be mandatory for everyone in indoor public areas and in outdoor crowded areas.

Proof of vaccination, recovery or a negative [rapid test](#) within the past 48 hours will also be required to travel by plane, train, boat or long-distance bus for anyone age 12 and over. For children ages 5-12, a self-test is acceptable, with the results uploaded to a government website.



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Kikilias also stressed there would be no grace period for the previously announced suspension from work as of Sept. 1 of [health care](#) and care home workers who refuse to get vaccinated. Vaccines are freely available in Greece to anyone over the age of 12.

"As there is now a choice, our professional, financial and social lives can't be suspended and I assure you ... that this will not happen," Kikilias said.

Greece has been seeing a steady increase in confirmed coronavirus cases and deaths, as well as hospitalizations and intubations, over the past several weeks. ICU beds for COVID-19 patients are more than 68% full, while regular COVID-19 wards are 45% full, health ministry figures show.

More than 11 million vaccine doses have been administered, with 5.6 million people now fully vaccinated.

"Thanks to the vaccine, we will not convert our hospitals again to prioritize those who are seriously ill with COVID," Kikilias said, adding that hospitals will continue caring for all cases.

"The contrary would be both unfair and unethical towards the majority of citizens who have been vaccinated and are suffering from other illnesses, and of course have a right to proper care," he said.

Greece, which has a population of around 11 million, has over 560,000 confirmed cases and 13,422 deaths in the pandemic.

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