Swiss make masks compulsory on public transport

1 July 2020

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Wearing a facemask on public transport will become compulsory, Switzerland said Wednesday, following a resurgence in COVID-19 cases in a country that had largely got the virus under control.

The wealthy landlocked country fully reopened its borders on June 15 and said the rise in cases was due to infected people entering the country, as it imposed 10-day quarantine measures on new arrivals from countries deemed to pose a risk.

The number of cases in Switzerland had been at a low and stable level for weeks but began to tick upwards in the second half of June as the wealthy nation lifted most of its remaining lockdown restrictions.

"Given the increasing use of public transport and the increase in cases since mid-June, the government decided to make wearing a mask mandatory on public transport," the government said in a statement.

The rule will apply from Monday to people aged 12 and above.

Currently, wearing a mask on public transport is recommended rather than compulsory.

Switzerland said Wednesday that 31,768 people in total had tested positive for the new coronavirus—up 137 in the last 24 hours, the biggest jump since April. Only 843 new cases were registered in the whole of June.

The Alpine nation, population 8.5 million, has registered 1,684 deaths due to the virus.

Quarantine

Switzerland stopped short of imposing strict confinement when it introduced measures in mid-March aimed at stopping the spread of the new coronavirus.

It began gradually easing its restrictions on April 27, with a fourth stage on June 22 lifting the maximum limit on gatherings to 1,000.

"Since mid-June, the new coronavirus has experienced an upsurge in Switzerland after infected people entered the country from Schengen and non-Schengen states" beyond Europe's open borders zone, said the government.

"Consequently, from July 6, anyone crossing the border from certain regions must quarantine themselves for 10 days," the Federal Council said. The list of countries will be published on Thursday.

Affected people will be informed on planes, coaches and at the borders, and must register with the local authorities once in Switzerland.

Switzerland has its own SwissCovid contract-tracing smartphone app, using Bluetooth wireless technology. It has been downloaded nearly a million times, with 928,909 signing up in the first six

days since it came out.

While the EU will lift entry restrictions from July 15
on travellers from 15 countries deemed to have the
virus under control (including Japan, South Korea,
Australia and Canada), Switzerland will do likewise
on July 20—with the exception of Serbia.

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APA citation: Swiss make masks compulsory on public transport (2020, July 1) retrieved 2 June 2022
from https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-07-swiss-masks-compulsory.html