Czechs reintroduce face masks indoors after virus spike

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Czechs will have to wear face masks in most public indoor settings in a bid to slow a record spike in COVID-19 cases, the health minister said Wednesday.

The restriction comes on the heels of a never-before-seen daily increase of 1,164 new confirmed COVID-19 cases reported Tuesday in the EU member nation of 10.7 million people.

"We have agreed with experts to introduce the duty to wear face masks inside buildings across the Czech Republic as of Thursday," Minister Adam Vojtech said in a tweet.

The measure affects restaurants, shops, schools—except classrooms—and workplaces unless employees remain two metres (six and a half feet) apart, although there are some exemptions like kindergarten-aged children and people eating or drinking.

Czechs have already had to wear face masks on public transport, in hospitals and public institutions and at railway stations and the Prague airport since the beginning of the month.

The World Health Organization called on governments in June to "encourage the general public to wear masks in specific situations and settings."

The Czech Republic had already introduced a blanket face mask requirement in March, soon after the pandemic struck Europe, and

managed to keep virus figures lower than most of the continent.

But in May, the centre-left government eased most of the restrictions, and the number of new cases started to rise again.

Last week, the country's chief public health officer announced she had tested positive for COVID-19.

The Czech Republic has registered almost 30,000 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 441 deaths.

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