

Medical face masks or respirators will be required in public places; changes in isolation and home quarantine period

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In order to limit the increasing spread of the Covid-19 Omicron *variant more efficiently*, only medical masks or unvalved respirators will be permitted in areas where face masks are required. In order to avoid the closure of critical industries due to the absence of employees, it is planned to reduce the period of isolation and home quarantine**, the Government decided today, on 18 January.

Use of medical masks and unvalved respirators in public places

From 25 January, in workplaces, shops, on public transport or other public place, individuals will have to use a medical face mask or unvalved respirator with a level of safety FFP2 - FFP3 or KN95. Face masks or respirators should also be used by vaccinated or recovered individuals. The only exception will be educational institutions where staff and pupils will be able to continue using previously centrally purchased and distributed non-medical (fabric) face masks with a high degree of protection. Also in other places, children between the ages of 7 and 12 will be able to use a non-medical (fabric) mask.

The need for high epidemiological safety requirements is associated with a sharp increase in the spread of Covid-19. Medical face masks and respirators, unlike fabric masks, have certain international quality and safety standards. The effectiveness of medical masks provides up to 90% protection compared to face coverings of other materials, while unvalved respirators have an even higher level of protection, protecting not only against the distribution of exhaled particles in the surrounding environment, but also against their inhalation from the environment. Similar practices exist in other countries, such as Austria, Greece, Slovenia, Italy and elsewhere, where non-medical masks are being replaced by the use of medical masks and respirators, both indoors and outdoors.

Changes in regard to isolation and home quarantine period

According to the latest recommendations of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and the need to ensure continuity of work in strategically important sectors, the required period of isolation or home quarantine has been reduced. At the same time, additional safety measures have been determined, including additional testing and the use of FFP2 unvalved respirators in the workplace. The new procedure does not apply to unvaccinated persons, to whom the previous procedure applies.

Vaccinated persons (primary or booster) or recovered identified as contact persons:

- spend 10 days in home quarantine;

- or perform a test at the laboratory or testing site as soon as possible; if the test is negative, continues to perform work duties using an unvalved FFP2 respirator for 10 days and retests on day 3 or 4 (negative);

- or may continue to perform work duties by performing a negative rapid antigen self-test every morning for seven days.

Isolation time for Covid-19 positive persons:

- isolation may also be begun after the positive Covid-19 self-test; work duties may be resumed on the 8th day, if no signs of illness have been observed for at least 24 hours;

- persons employed in critical industries must observe 3 days of isolation and, if there have been no symptoms of illness for at least the last 24 hours, perform a laboratory test; if the test is negative, they may return to work onsite.

In these cases, an FFP2 respirator should be used for 10 days after confirmation of infection and close contact with other people should be avoided.

Home quarantine for pupils and children of pre-school establishments identified as contact persons:

- home quarantine for 10 days or may continue to attend the educational institution if an antigen test organised by the educational institution is performed every day for 7 days. Resuming attendance of the educational institution, it is not required to present a laboratory test result or doctor's certificate.

Isolation period for pupils and pre-school children infected with Covid-19:

- may resume attending an educational institution on the 8th day if there have been no symptoms of the illness during the last 24 hours. Resuming attendance of the educational institution, it is not required to present a laboratory test result or doctor's certificate.

The decision to reduce the isolation or home quarantine period was taken in line with the latest recommendations of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control for cases where it is necessary to simultaneously control the spread of the virus and secure the operation of industries vital for the functioning of society.

**Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 662 of 28 September 2021 "Epidemiological Safety Measures for the Containment of the Spread of Covid-19 Infection".*

***Amendments to Cabinet Order No. 720, adopted on 9 October 2021, "Regarding Declaration of the Emergency Situation".*

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<https://www.mk.gov.lv/en/article/medical-face-masks-or-respirators-will-be-required-public-places-changes-isolation-and-home-quarantine-period>