

**Outdoor mask mandate adjusted starting May 2**  
**5월 2일(월)부터 실외 마스크 착용 의무 조정**

PRESS RELEASE

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The Central Disaster and Safety Countermeasures Headquarters (CDSCHQ) received and discussed a report from Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (Commissioner Jeong Eun Kyeong) about the adjustment plan for the outdoor mask mandate.

<1> Current Trends and Analysis

Currently, outdoor mask mandate (KRW 100,000 fine for non-compliance) is enforced in cases where a 2-meter distance between people cannot be maintained, particularly in settings with large crowds such as rallies, concerts, or events.

In reality, however, most people wear face masks in outdoor spaces whether a physical distance of 2 meters is maintained or not.

The Korean government has been preparing the nation for a new normal by phasing in adjusted protocol measures — lifting social distancing protocols (April 18) and reclassifying COVID-19 as a Class 2 from a Class 1 notifiable infectious disease (April 25) — in line with changes in the domestic pandemic situation.

In particular, since open spaces allow natural and continuous air ventilation, the risk of infection through airborne saliva droplets outdoors is substantially lower than that of indoors.

Therefore, once the nation's COVID-19 situation becomes stable, a further transition step into voluntary actions for public health in everyday life should be taken by lifting the outdoor mask mandate first.

Recently, the Omicron wave has steadily declined for six continuous weeks after reaching its peak (3rd week of March) in the nation. The number of severe or critical cases and deaths continues to show a modest downward trend.

While many foreign countries have not enforced a mandatory mask-wearing rule, others such as Singapore and New Zealand have eased mandated mask-wearing after their Omicron wave passed its peak.

A fair comparison between Korea and other countries may not be completely possible considering the different circumstances facing each country in terms of the pandemic situation. Nevertheless, the level of confirmed cases at the time when other countries lifted their outdoor mask mandates was similar to (Singapore) or higher than (New Zealand, France) the recent level in Korea, and these countries have not experienced any meaningful change in the downward trend of confirmed cases afterward.

WHO and ECDC also recommend wearing masks outdoors when physical distancing is not possible, taking into account the fact that the risk of infection transmission outdoors is lower than that of indoors.

(WHO) Wearing a mask is recommended where physical distancing of at least 1 meter cannot be maintained.

(ECDC) Wearing a mask should be considered in crowded outdoor settings where physical distancing is not possible.

## <2> Adjustment Plan

The outdoor mask mandate will be adjusted and implemented as follows from May 2, 2022 (Mon.), until further notice.

People will still be required to wear masks when attending outdoor gatherings, concerts, or sporting events with 50 or more people. Other than these situations, wearing a mask in outdoor spaces will not be required, and therefore, individuals may choose to wear a mask or not based on personal preference.

This adjustment measure seeks to relax the mandate, which otherwise imposes a penalty for non-compliance, and to allow the public to choose to mask in outdoor spaces if they desire. Even with the mandatory rule being relaxed, wearing a mask outdoors is strongly recommended in the following situations.

**< Cases where wearing a mask outdoors is strongly recommended >**

- ① If you have symptoms of COVID-19 such as fever or cough
- ② If you belong to a high-risk group for COVID-19\*
  - \* The elderly, the immunocompromised, patients with chronic respiratory disease, unvaccinated people, etc.
- ③ When you use outdoor public-use facilities\* or attend events with more than 50 people
  - \* Sports venues (less than 50 people), amusement facilities (amusement parks, water parks), sports facilities (including winter sports facilities), and equivalent outdoor public-use facilities (with seating for 50 or more people)
- ④ When you are in crowded outdoor circumstances as follows
  - When it is difficult for you to continuously (for 15 minutes or longer) maintain physical distancing of at least 1 meter from other groups of people
  - When saliva droplets are easily produced and spread due to respiratory activities such as singing together or shouting

The government explained that the easing of the outdoor mask mandate seeks to limit the places or circumstances where fines are imposed, rather than completely remove the rule, and that the voluntary mask-wearing of individuals is still needed.

The government urged citizens to wear masks outdoors if they have symptoms of COVID-19, belong to high-risk groups, use outdoor public-use facilities, or attend events with more than 50 people, or when they are in crowded settings where physical distancing cannot be maintained or saliva droplets can be easily produced.

In addition, the government stressed that the choice of individuals to wear masks outdoors should be respected, and therefore, each citizen should decide whether or not to wear a mask depending on the situation.

In addition, the indoor mask-wearing mandate remains in place without change.

The government underscored the importance of wearing masks indoors and the necessity of strict compliance with the rule to avoid a high risk of infection, regardless of the easing of the outdoor mask-wearing requirements. The government also asked citizens to use outdoor spaces rather than enclosed indoor spaces, if possible, for exercise or gatherings.