

INTER NATIONAL

Mask-free and 'low risk', Italy welcomes milestone in Covid pandemic

All of Italy became a mask-free, "low-risk" zone for coronavirus Monday, marking a dramatic milestone for the first European country to be hit by the global pandemic in February 2020. In a decree that took effect Monday, the health ministry for the first time classified each of Italy's 20 regions as "white", signifying low risk, under the country's colour-coded classification system that evaluates Covid-19 risk. That means facemasks will no longer be compulsory in outdoor areas -- welcome news across the country where an ongoing heatwave is expected to push temperatures past 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) in some southern areas this week. Once a symbol of the coronavirus crisis in the West -- where images of army trucks transporting coffins from the overflowing morgue in the northern city of Bergamo were seen around the world -- Italy has seen Covid-19 infections and deaths plummet in recent weeks. A third of Italy's population over the age of 12 has been vaccinated as of Sunday, or 17,572,505 people, according to the government. Long prohibited from entering the country, tourists from the European Union, Britain, the United States, Canada and Japan are now back after the government removed a quarantine requirement for vaccinated visitors, or those who test negative.

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1st post-pandemic cruise ship from US sails away

The first cruise ship to leave a U.S. port since the coronavirus pandemic brought the industry to a 15-month standstill sailed away on Saturday with nearly all vaccinated passengers on board. Celebrity Edge departed Fort Lauderdale, Florida, at 6 p.m. with the number of passengers limited to about 40% capacity, and with nearly all 1,100 passengers vaccinated against COVID-19. Celebrity Cruises, one of Royal Caribbean Cruise's brands, says 99% of the passengers are vaccinated, well over the 95% requirement imposed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A giant greeting was projected on a wall of one of the port buildings: "Someday is here. Welcome back." Passengers arrived with matching T-shirts that read phrases such as "straight outta vaccination" and "vaccinated and ready to cruise." "Words can't describe how excited we are to be a part of this historic sailing today," said Elizabeth Rosner, 28, who moved from Michigan to Orlando, Florida, in December 2019 with her fiancé just to be close to the cruise industry's hub. To comply with both the CDC's requirement and a new Florida law banning businesses from requiring customers to show proof of vaccination, Celebrity Cruises asked guests if they would like to share their vaccination status. Those who did not show or say they are vaccinated face additional restrictions.

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