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Rome, June 22 (RHC)-- People in Italy will no longer have to wear masks outdoors from June 28, the government has said, as COVID-19 cases and hospitalisations decline in one of Europe's worst-hit countries by the pandemic.

Mandatory masks were imposed in October last year, when the country was entering a second wave of infections and authorities were struggling to curb a surging national caseload.

Prime Minister Mario Draghi's government has been steadily lifting restrictions since April, allowing restaurants, bars, cinemas and gyms to reopen and permitting freedom of movement around the country.

The wearing of masks was one of the last rules to remain in place. It will not be lifted entirely; people will still be required to wear masks in indoor public areas and on public transport. People will be advised to continue carrying a mask with them when they leave home and be ready to wear it outdoors if there is a crowd and for events with higher risk of virus transmission, such as large gatherings.

The decision will be effective from next Monday, when the nation is expected to be a COVID-19 white zone, the lowest risk level in Italy's four-tier colour-coded system to calibrate curbs in its 20 regions. Nineteen regions are already white.

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