Turkey makes masks compulsory in 42 provinces after uptick

ANKARA: Turkey has made the wearing of face masks mandatory in five more provinces, following an uptick in COVID-19 cases.

Health Minister Fahrettin Koca tweeted early Tuesday that the wearing of masks is now compulsory in 42 of Turkey's 81 provinces.

In the remaining provinces, residents are required to wear masks on public transportation and in shops and malls, and are being advised to wear masks and keep to social distancing practices elsewhere.

Koca tweeted: "we cannot struggle against the virus without masks."

Turkey is seeing an upward trend in the daily number of infections after the government authorized cafes, restaurants, gyms, parks, beaches and museums to reopen, lifted inter-city travel restrictions and eased stay-at-home orders for the elderly and young at the start of June.

The daily number of infections climbed to above 1,500 in the past five days after hovering around 800-900 previously. The country has registered a total of 179,831 cases and 4,825 deaths.

Pinar Oktay, a member of Turkey's scientific advisory body spoke of the possibility of the resumption of some lockdown measures.

"The increase is being monitored very carefully," Oktay told HaberTurk news channel. "If the increase continues in this way, we may have to reimpose some measures.

In the eastern province of Ardahan, the number of infections jumped from just three to 18 following the lifting of travel restrictions and the arrival from travelers from other regions, Gov. Mustafa Masatli said Monday.

A village in the central province of Konya was placed under quarantine after 22 people were infected following a funeral wake, Hurriyet newspaper reported.

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[UAE allows travel to specific destinations from next week](#)

Mon, 2020-06-15 22:24

The UAE announced on Monday that citizens and residents are allowed to travel to specific destinations as of June 23, state news agency WAM reported.

A list of the destinations, the groups authorized to travel, and the procedures that must be adhered to before, during, and after returning from travel for citizens and residents will be announced later, WAM reported.

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UAE extends Abu Dhabi travel ban

[France slams Turkey over Libya interference](#)

Mon, 2020-06-15 20:43

PARIS: France said on Monday it condemned any ongoing foreign interference in Libya, singling out the intensification of Turkish support.
"This is not acceptable and must end", the French Foreign ministry said in a statement.

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France says Turkey conduct in Libya 'unacceptable'Turkey military runs drill in east Mediterranean 'show of force'

[UAE extends Abu Dhabi travel ban](#)

Mon, 2020-06-15 19:06

DUBAI: A travel ban into and out of Abu Dhabi and between the emirate's three main regions is to be extended for another week.
The UAE's Emergency Crises and Disaster Management Committee said Monday the ban will continue for another week starting Tuesday.
The ban was introduced on June 2 as part of measures to tackle the spread of the coronavirus.

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[How Middle East's coronavirus crisis threatens the environment too](#)

Mon, 2020-06-15 18:37

DUBAI: The COVID-19 pandemic has set the world back on the slippery slope of plastic overuse, just when it seemed as if plastic reduction was becoming an achievable goal, experts fear.

The priority of hygiene to combat the spread of the virus has led to a sharp increase in the consumption of disposable plastic products — gloves, single-use water bottles, cutlery, packaging and medical supplies — across the world.

In some Gulf cities, many dine-in customers are being served up to three plastic plates, cups and sets of cutlery for a single three-course meal.

"It's a disaster," said Tatiana Antonelli Abella, founder and managing director of the UAE-based green social enterprise Goumbook. "The pandemic has undoubtedly impacted every aspect of our lives, from work to school and our daily tasks.

"It is unfortunate that sustainable practices that have taken a lot of work to implement have now been replaced, due to sanitization (requirements), by the use of single-use plastic bottles, cutlery and crockery in restaurants and delivery services."

Last year, some communities across the UAE banned plastic use in restaurants, while supermarkets planned to charge customers for their plastic bags. Almost overnight, the initiative has taken a back seat.

In this photo taken on May 13, 2020, Gary Stokes, founder of the environmental group Oceans Asia, poses with discarded face masks he found on a beach in the residential area of Discovery Bay on the outlying Lantau island in Hong Kong. (AFP/File Photo)

"It is a contentious matter, as many would argue against any evidence that using reusables, if sanitized correctly, could in any way be dangerous," Abella told Arab News.

"Dish-washing machines, high temperatures and dish soap have always been 100 percent efficient (as sanitizers) and always will be. And most of the plastic used is also not fully recyclable.

FASTFACT

Disposables

Eco-friendly disposable items are 20-30 percent more expensive

"Unfortunately, if plastic is not properly washed and cleaned, it is considered contaminated and will end up as general waste in landfills."

Other sustainability experts concur. "If restaurants clean their tableware and cutlery with hot water and detergent after every use, there is no need for single-use items," said Amruta Kshemkalyani, a UAE-based sustainability adviser and founder of Sustainability Tribe.

Women wearing masks for protection against the coronavirus, sit at a restaurant in the Mall of Dubai on April 28, 2020, after the shopping centre was reopened. (AFP/File Photo)

"Restaurants just need to pay extra attention to their tableware cleaning process. COVID-19 shouldn't be used as an excuse to create unnecessary waste and harm the environment."

Peter Avram, director of the Dubai-based Avani Middle East, which produces disposable packaging solutions and compostable plastic alternatives, said there had been a surge in the use of disposables during the current pandemic.

"Regrettably, due to the current economic situation, plastic is being preferred to the eco-friendly options simply because of costs," he said. "Eco-friendly disposables are 20 to 30 percent more expensive."

The UAE consumes an average of 450 plastic bottles of water per person per year — or more than four billion bottles annually.

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

"It hurts to see so many years of hard work from environmental organizations going 'to waste'," Abella said. "The relaxation on the [consumption of] single-use plastics, even if temporary, could quite likely have long-term consequences on consumer behavior."

When Kshemkalyani started a zero-waste lifestyle in 2015, almost no restaurants and cafes in Dubai were aware of the concept of serving food and drinks in reusable containers.

> **The environmental cause is expected to return to the foreground when the crisis passes.**
>
> Peter Avram, Director of Avani Middle East

Since then, the #zerowasteUAE social initiative and Sustainability Tribe have made tireless efforts to bring awareness to the community on waste issues.

"Now, in the name of hygiene and convenience, if the disposable culture gets popular again, it will be a big hurdle in society's progress towards sustainable habits," she said, especially when there is no evidence that a switch to single-use items is imperative during COVID-19.

Emiratis wearing masks for protection against the coronavirus, buy coffee at a shop in the Mall of Dubai on April 28, 2020, after the shopping centre was reopened. (AFP/File Photo)

Kshemkalyani questioned whether restaurants are recycling their plastic waste or just dumping it. "We do not want more waste in landfills that will further

contaminate and pollute our land, water and air," she said.

"Restaurants can start using their reusable serving sets and intensify the right cleaning and hygiene procedures. Instead of spending on single-use items, they have an opportunity to keep their manpower and use it wisely for intensified cleaning — this would also help employment."

Kshemkalyani also recommended that restaurants allow customers to bring their own plates, cutlery and glasses. "Restaurants can also use environmentally friendly disposables, like palm leaf and wood [cutlery], as a temporary measure," she said.

According to Abella, "It is important to keep the conversation going to use your consumer power to campaign for these changes."

Garbage litters the shore of Zouk Mikael, north of the Lebanese capital Beirut, on January 22, 2018. (AFP/File Photo)

Although some outlets are seeking to offer alternatives, consumers should also vote with their wallets and ask restaurants to use sustainable alternatives, she said.

She said: "We should try to cook more at home and, if need be, choose restaurants that make an effort to serve their food in eco-friendly packaging."

She pointed to the trend of people ordering more items than usual during the lockdown, with many of the items delivered in plastic containers, "wrapped in plastic and bagged in more plastic."

Avram said that sustainability and recycling efforts must continue, pointing to the uptick in home composting procedures that many residents have begun to undertake to dispose of eco-friendly takeaway items.

A man wearing a protective mask, as a precaution against COVID-19 coronavirus disease, walks outside an empty cafe along Tahlia street in the centre of the capital Riyadh on March 15, 2020. (AFP/File Photo)

"That has been very encouraging," he said. "It is expected that the environmental cause will return to the foreground when the crisis has passed."
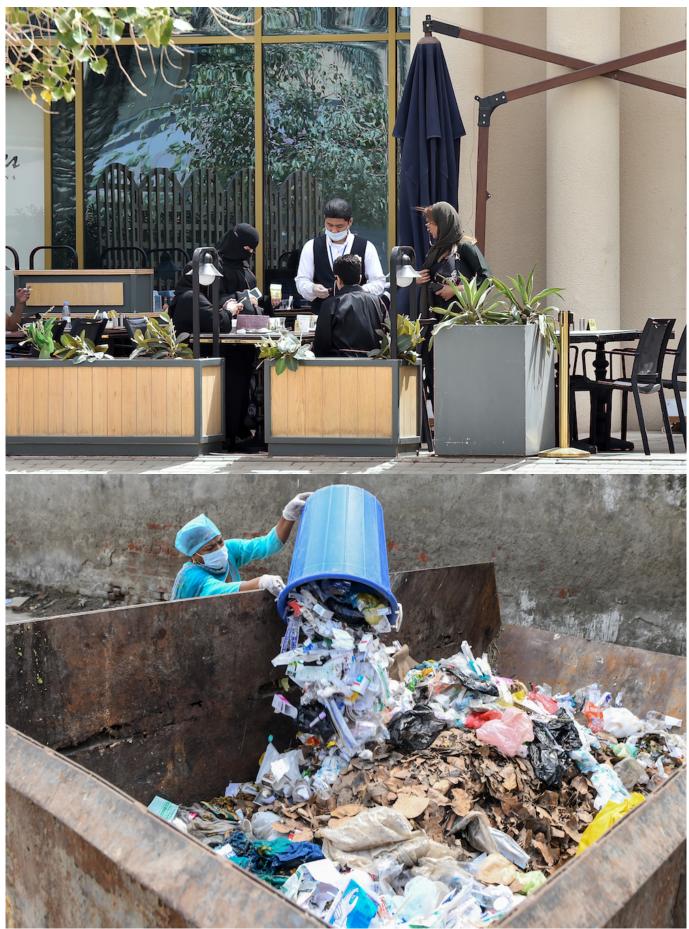
Shams Hasan, air quality and corporate environmental responsibility expert at Envipro Consulting in the US, told Arab News: "The COVID-19 pandemic has created strange problems. Plastic items that were being phased out are at least temporarily back in use. The … fear is that during any crisis, society will start looking at an easy way out and apply 'band-aid' solutions instead of working on long-term strategies and solutions."

Kristin Hughes, director of Global Plastic Action Partnership and a member of the executive committee, World Economic Forum, pointed to the challenge

facing the world.

"We stand at the junction of two diverging paths," she said. "One is a stop-gap solution that puts us solidly on track toward a not-so-distant future in which there is more plastic in the ocean than fish. The other is a sustainable model of living and working that will benefit us long into the future – one that will create a healthier, more equitable and more livable future for all."

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@CalineMalek

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G20 agrees final communique with reference to climate change