Israel reimposes indoor mask requirement amid COVID spike
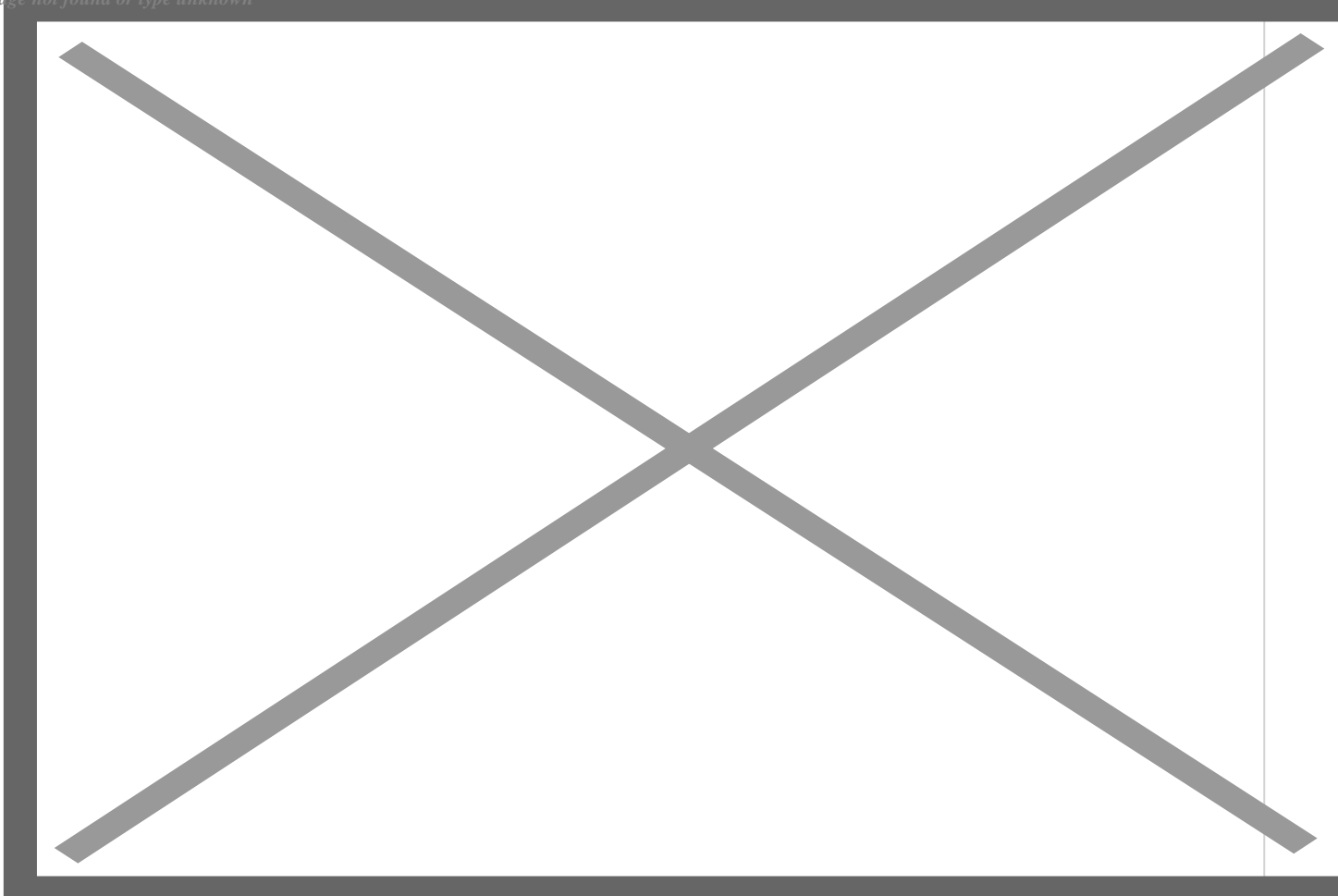

The spike in new infections is a blow for a country that has vaccinated some 55 percent of its 9.3 million population with both doses [File: Corinna Kern/Reuters]

Tel Aviv, June 26 (RHC)-- The Israeli health ministry has asked people to again wear masks in enclosed public places just 10 days after ending its mandatory indoor masking rule, amid a sustained surge in coronavirus infections attributed to the highly contagious Delta variant.

The spike in new infections is a blow for a country that has vaccinated some 55 percent of its 9.3 million population with both doses.

The head of Israel's pandemic response task force, Nachman Ash, told public radio the requirement came after four days of more than 100 new cases a day, with 227 confired casesy. "We are seeing a doubling every few days," Ash said. "Another thing that's worrying is that the infections are spreading. If we had two cities where most of the infections were, we have more cities where the numbers are rising and communities where the cases are going up."

Ash said the rise in cases was likely due to the highly contagious Delta variant of the virus first detected in India. Reimposing the mask requirement is a setback for Israel, coming so quickly after it was lifted on June 15 on the back of a successful vaccination campaign. Ash said despite the increased number of positive cases, he did not yet see a parallel rise in hospitalisations or deaths.

"It's clear it's a factor of time, that not enough time has passed," Ash said. "But we hope the vaccines will protect us from a rise in hospitalisation and difficult cases."

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