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No COVID-19 test, no grape harvest in Spain's Basque Country

All wine industry workers in Spain's Rioja-producing region of Alava must undergo a coronavirus test before they start work to prevent COVID-19 outbreaks putting the grape harvest at risk.

Grape pickers, who have dubbed 2020 the "harvest of the masks", will be given their own equipment, including baskets and scissors, which cannot be exchanged, to avoid infections, said a spokeswoman for the Rioja wine regulatory board.

Authorities in the Basque Country have

made it compulsory for wine estates to provide a list of workers. The health department then carries out the PCR tests.

Seasonal workers living in precarious conditions were hard hit by coronavirus outbreaks this summer in Spain, prompting authorities to impose local lockdowns in fruit-growing areas. Authorities are keen to avoid a repetition as the grape harvesting season gets underway.

"Until we get the result of the test, we cannot work," an employee in the wine industry, Quintino Benigno, told Reuters.



EU-bound trucks from UK could face two-day delays after Brexit, Britain says

British trucks could face delays of up to two days to enter Europe and queues of around 7,000 lorries after Britain leaves the bloc at the end of this year, disrupting imports and exports of crucial goods, the government has warned.

Michael Gove, the minister overseeing the Brexit talks, told the logistics and freight industry that truck drivers would face new customs controls and processes irrespective of whether a trade deal can be agreed between the two sides.

He said under the government's reasonable worst case scenario, up to 70% of trucks travelling to the EU might not be ready for new border controls.

"This could lead to maximum queues of around 7,000 port bound trucks in Kent (in England) and associated maximum delays of up to two days," he said.

Britain formally left the bloc in January but remains in a status quo transition period that will expire at the end of this year. The government assumes EU member states will impose third country controls on Britain at the end of the transition period.

"Irrespective of the outcome of negotiations between the UK and EU, traders will face new customs controls and processes," he said. "Simply put, if traders, both in the UK and EU, have not completed the right paperwork, their goods will be stopped when entering the EU and disruption will occur."

Dover, in the southeast of England, has been Britain's most important gateway to Europe since Roman times and the port now handles 17 percent of the United Kingdom's goods trade. Up to 10,000 trucks a day pass through with everything from perishable food to medicines.

A government spokesman said this was not a forecast or prediction of what will happen but rather a "stretching scenario".

It is also launching a Smart Freight IT service that will enable drivers and hauliers to complete a border readiness check, and only allow compliant vehicles to enter the port area.

85 percent fewer tourists in the Balearics

● Hotel bookings by British tourists fell by 91 percent in August, according to official figures.

Travel restrictions around Europe aimed at curbing coronavirus contagion ravaged Spain's tourism industry during the crucial month of August, depriving it of millions of tourists. The occupancy rate in Spanish hotels fell 64% last month from a year ago, data from the National Statistics Institute showed yesterday. In the first eight months of the year, hotel bookings slumped 70% from the same period in 2019.

Travel restrictions imposed by European countries during the summer, amid a resurgence of coronavirus infections in Spain, have hit Spanish hotels hard after they emerged from a strict lockdown

that had kept them shut between mid-March and late June.

Hotel bookings by British tourists plummeted over 91% in August, meaning the country lost about 1.1 million British visitors alone, while bookings from Germany were down 80%, the data showed. The Balearic islands lost 86% of their foreign tourists compared to a year earlier.

The tourism sector accounts for about 12% of the Spanish economy, providing more than one job in eight. Spain, one of the world's most visited countries, received more than 80 million foreign visitors each year, mainly from European countries.