

# Merkel orders tough curbs to tame virus (Update)

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Germany on Wednesday ordered a new round of shutdowns for the cultural and leisure as well as food and drink sectors, in a bid to halt a surge in new coronavirus infections.

The tough restrictions to come into force from Monday November 2 to the end of the month would limit contact outdoors to people from two households.

Schools, daycare centres and shops will remain open, but hotel stays will be allowed only for "necessary and expressedly non-tourism purposes".

Bars, cafes and restaurants must shut, although takeaways and delivery services can continue.

Professional sports, including Bundesliga football, have also been pushed back behind closed doors.

Theatres, operas and cinemas will also have to scrap their shows during what is traditionally their busiest season.

Chancellor Angela Merkel acknowledged that the measures are "strict and arduous" but she urged a "national effort".

At the the current rate of new infections, "we will reach the limits of the health system," she warned.

The number of new cases had doubled today from a week ago, while the number of people in intensive care has also doubled in the last 10 days, she noted.

"The curve must be flattened again... so that contact tracing can be once again carried out," she said, adding that in three out of four cases today, officials are no longer able to determine where the transmission occurred.

## **New daily record**

Europe's biggest economy coped relatively well with the first coronavirus wave earlier in the year but numbers have risen rapidly in recent weeks, in step with the rest of the continent.

The tally of new daily cases now regularly crosses the 10,000 mark, and hit a new 24-hour record of 14,964 on Wednesday, according to data from the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) for disease control.

That is still well below figures seen in neighbouring France, where daily cases have topped 50,000, or Belgium where hospitals are reaching capacity.

But the number of COVID-19 patients in intensive care in Germany has also surged, from just under 400 in early October to 1,570 by Wednesday.

Health Minister Jens Spahn, who is working from home after testing positive for the virus, said urgent action was required.

"If we wait until the intensive care beds are full, then it will be too late," he told regional broadcaster Suedwestrundfunk.

## **'We'll go bankrupt'**

With a new shutdown to once again inflict the hardest blow to sectors which took the most painful hit in the spring, Merkel's government will offer 10 billion euros (\$12 billion) in aid.

The help targeted not only at businesses and associations but also thousands of self-employed people will reimburse up to 75 percent of comparable revenues a year ago.

But employees and bosses in the worst-hit industries marched on

Wednesday in protest at new restrictions, while the federation of wholesalers and trade warned that shutting restaurants would sound the death knell for many small companies.

Pascal Reichsten, 23, who works at a bouncer, said he had been out of work for seven months.

"I do this job to pay my school fees. But I can no longer afford it because I have no more work," he said at the Berlin protest.

Cordula Weidenbach, 45, whose company rents furniture for exhibitions, meanwhile told AFP that the firm's revenues have almost completely collapsed.

"If it goes on like that, we'll go bankrupt."

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