

Experts propose vaccine priority list as German deaths rise

December 17 2020, by Frank Jordans



A cross is seen near a refrigeration container storing Covid-19 victims on the cemetery in Hanau near Frankfurt, Germany, Thursday, Dec. 17, 2020. The stored bodies coming from homes or hospitals are later taken by an undertaker for the funeral. The first two victims were stored in the container on Wednesday. (AP Photo/Michael Probst)

An independent expert team on Thursday recommended that people over age 80, residents and staff in nursing homes, and medics at high risk of exposing themselves or others to COVID-19 should be the first in Germany to get the coronavirus vaccine.

The recommendation, which is likely to form the basis of an official decree Friday, comes as Germany grapples with a growing number of new cases and deaths from the coronavirus.

The seven-day rolling average of daily deaths in Germany has risen over the past two weeks from almost 350 deaths per day on Dec. 2 to almost 545 deaths per day on Dec. 16. In response, authorities agreed to impose tougher lockdown measures this week that included the closure of schools and most stores until at least Jan. 10.

In total, Germany has recorded over 1.4 million confirmed cases and more than 24,500 deaths, according to Johns Hopkins University. Some German towns have begun resorting to storing the bodies of coronavirus victims in cooled containers next to cemeteries until they can be buried.

But Health Minister Jens Spahn has said there's "light at the end of the tunnel" in the form of vaccines which may become available from Dec. 27—two weeks after authorities had originally hoped.

The European Medicines Agency is next week reviewing an approval request by German company BioNTech, whose COVID-19 vaccine made together with Pfizer is already available in Britain, the U.S. and some other countries.



People wait in a long line for a SARS CoV-2 rapid test at the Corona Antigen Rapid test center at the 'KitKat-Club' in Berlin, Germany, Thursday, Dec. 17, 2020. Germany recorded around 27,000 newly confirmed cases Thursday and over 650 additional deaths according to the Robert Koch Institute, Germany's national disease control agency. (Photo/Markus Schreiber)



Chairs are lined up in in the Festhalle in Frankfurt, Germany, during the introducing of a vacciantion center on Thursday, Dec. 17, 2020. German states saying they expect vaccination to start on Dec. 27, 2020. (AP Photo/Michael Probst)



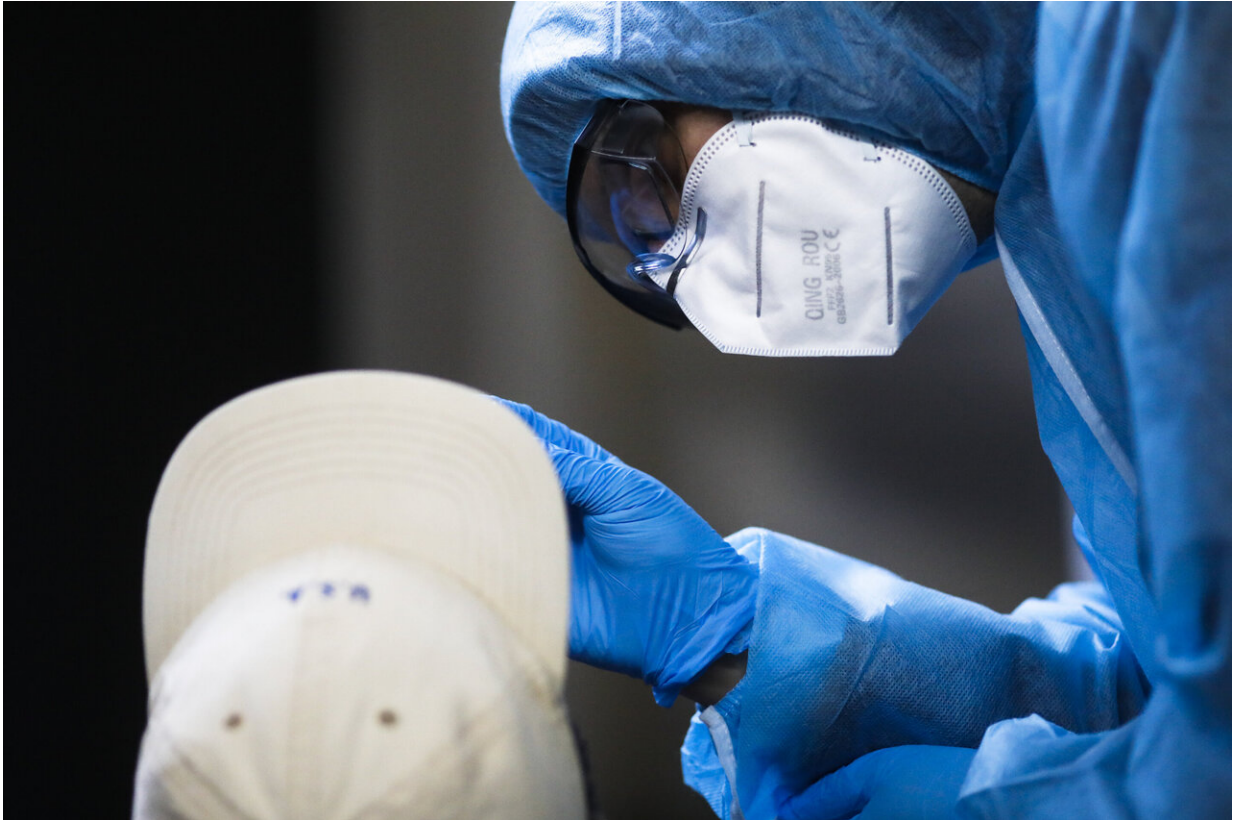
People wait in a long line for a SARS CoV-2 rapid test at the Corona Antigen Rapid test center at the 'KitKat-Club' in Berlin, Germany, Thursday, Dec. 17, 2020. Germany recorded around 27,000 newly confirmed cases Thursday and over 650 additional deaths according to the Robert Koch Institute, Germany's national disease control agency. (Photo/Markus Schreiber)



A medical staff explains a SARS CoV-2 rapid test to a person at the Corona Antigen Rapid test center at the 'KitKat-Club' in Berlin, Germany, Thursday, Dec. 17, 2020. Germany recorded around 27,000 newly confirmed cases Thursday and over 650 additional deaths according to the Robert Koch Institute, Germany's national disease control agency. (Photo/Markus Schreiber)



Doctor Georg Siemon looks out of a traditional small Frankfurt kiosk (Trinkhalle) in Frankfurt, Germany, Thursday, Dec.17, 2020. The doctor offers COVID tests with a result in 20 minutes in the kiosk that was given up two weeks ago by its owners due to low business because of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Michael Probst)



A nose swab is taken from a man for a SARS CoV-2 rapid test at the Corona Antigen Rapid test center at the 'KitKat-Club' in Berlin, Germany, Thursday, Dec. 17, 2020. Germany recorded around 27,000 newly confirmed cases Thursday and over 650 additional deaths according to the Robert Koch Institute, Germany's national disease control agency. (Photo/Markus Schreiber)



A refrigeration container storing Covid-19 victims stands on the cemetery in Hanau near Frankfurt, Germany, Thursday, Dec. 17, 2020. The stored bodies coming from homes or hospitals are later taken by an undertaker for the funeral. The first two victims were stored in the container on Wednesday. (AP Photo/Michael Probst)



Frankfurt's mayor Peter Feldmann, right, stands in the Festhalle in Frankfurt, Germany, during the introducing of a vaccination center on Thursday, Dec. 17, 2020. German states say they expect vaccination to start on Dec. 27. (AP Photo/Michael Probst)

Due to the need to get final approval from the European Commission and then conduct quality checks on some batches, the final rollout across the 27-nation bloc will likely happen shortly after Christmas.

"And then we can actually start with the first hundreds of thousands of doses," said Spahn, who has also backed the proposal of giving those over age 80 priority in the first round of immunization.

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