

Calls grow for wider lockdown as German virus cases rise

December 11 2020, by David Rising



Lights burn in houses in Frankfurt, Germany, Friday, Dec. 11, 2020, as the German government discusses further restrictions to avoid the outspread of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Michael Probst)

Calls grew Friday for tougher lockdown measures soon in Germany as the country's disease control center reported record daily increases in both coronavirus cases and deaths.

The Robert Koch Institute said the country's 16 states reported 29,875 new cases of COVID-19, breaking the previous daily record of 23,679 cases reported the day before.

The number of deaths from the virus rose by 598, to a total of 20,970. The previous daily record of deaths was 590, set on Wednesday.

"There clearly need to be extra measures, and I want to say as [health minister](#) that they are needed sooner rather than later," Health Minister Jens Spahn said.

"We wouldn't be able to forgive ourselves if this Christmas became above all a festival for the virus," he added. "And if we're honest, the virus doesn't take much account of whether we've all finished our Christmas shopping or not."

Interior Minister Horst Seehofer told Der Spiegel magazine that a lockdown "needs to be immediate."

Under current restrictions implemented at the beginning of November as numbers were growing exponentially, restaurants, bars, leisure and sports facilities have been closed and hotels are closed to tourists, but schools and nonessential shops have remained open.

The numbers had plateaued—but at high daily levels—and have again been rising in recent days.



Lights burn in two apartment houses in Frankfurt, Germany, Friday, Dec. 11, 2020, as the German government discusses further restrictions to avoid the outspread of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Michael Probst)

That prompted Chancellor Angela Merkel this week to call on state governments, which are responsible for imposing and lifting restrictions, to consider closing schools early for Christmas and other measures.

"We are in a decisive, perhaps the decisive, phase of fighting the pandemic," she said.

Merkel was expected to meet with governors to talk over new measures

no later than Sunday.

The latest polls show nearly 50% of Germans are for tougher restrictions, while 35% support the current lockdown measures. There have been truculent protests against the regulations that have garnered much attention, but polls show fewer than 15% of Germans think they are too strict.

Several states have already announced new restrictions on their own, including worst-hit Saxony, which has announced schools and most stores will be shut starting Monday until Jan. 10. The eastern state has more than twice the number of infections per capita in the past week than the national average.

In the southwestern state of Baden-Wuerttemberg, governor Winfried Kretschmann said that public life would be shut down as far as possible until at least Jan. 10, and that he would work with neighboring regions if all 16 states couldn't agree on a national approach.

"In a marathon, the final kilometers are always the hardest," he said.

Prospects of a united approach appear to be rising, though, as ever more governors say the situation is alarming.



Customers line up near a sign with the inscription 'Please keep your distance - At the moment we can only let 280 customers into the store' in front of the entrance of a department store in Munich, Germany, Dec. 10, 2020. (Peter Kneffel/dpa via AP)

"We need a pan-German response, not a response just for individual states, and we need a real turnaround for all of Germany," said Armin Laschet, the governor of North Rhine-Westphalia, the country's most populous state.

"We all have the aim of reducing infection figures clearly and very quickly now, and we all know that can only succeed if we drastically reduce social contacts," Laschet said. Schools in his state should switch to distance learning starting Monday, he said.

Germany in the spring managed to avoid the high number of infections and grim death tolls seen in other large European nations, and still continues to have a much lower overall fatality rate than countries such as Britain, France or Spain.

But Germany's new cases per 100,000 residents over the past 14 days are now higher than in France, Belgium and Spain, and about level with Britain, though still well below Italy, Sweden and many others, according to the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control.

Robert Koch Institute president Lothar Wieler said this week that Germans had reduced their contacts by about 40%, but that a reduction of greater than 60% was needed to bring numbers down.

"If people don't manage this 60% reduction on their own, then other measures must be considered," he said. "If this doesn't succeed, I don't see any other possibility."

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