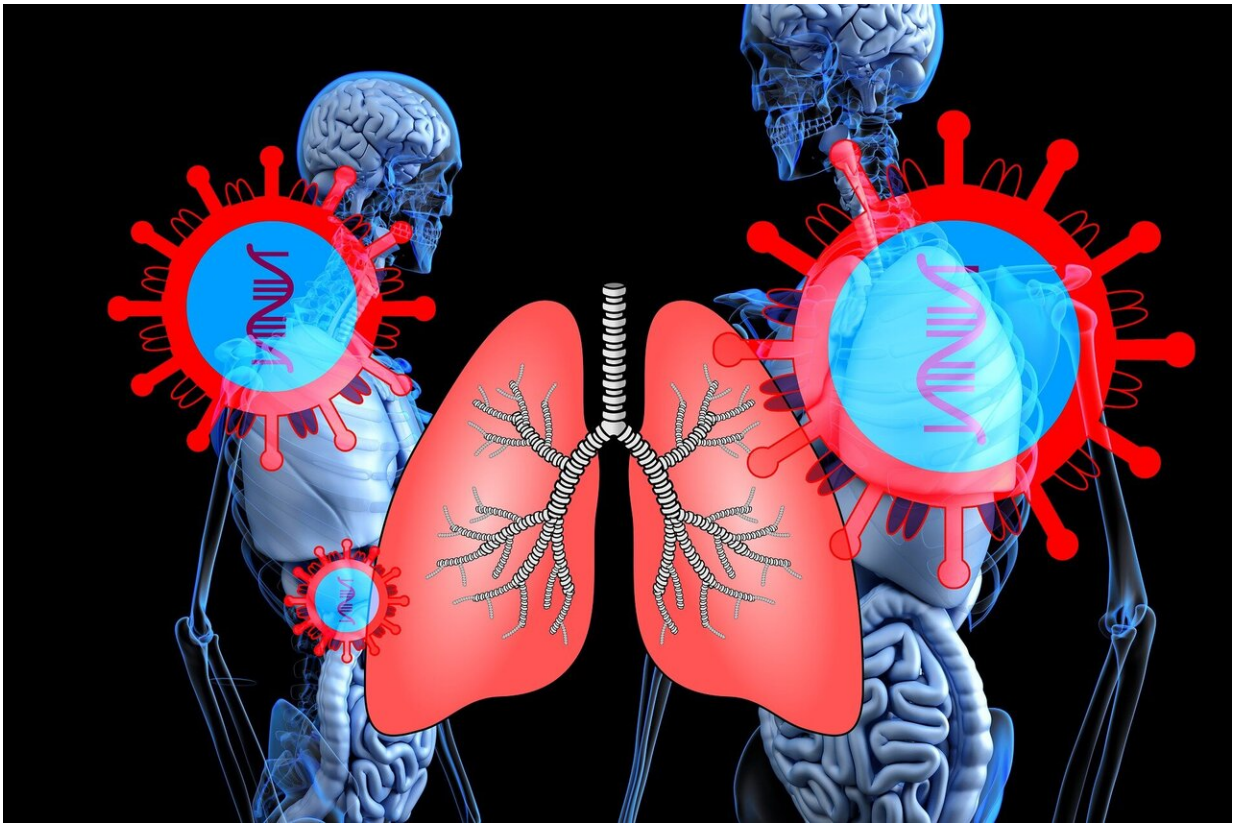


Austria scraps plan to ease lockdown after testing row

January 4 2021



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Austria's government on Monday effectively extended its third coronavirus lockdown, scrapping a proposal that would have allowed citizens to access some services if they took part in a mass-testing

programme.

The country's current [lockdown](#) is scheduled to run until January 24.

However, the government had proposed that those who tested negative in a nationwide, free COVID-19 mass-testing programme be allowed to visit shops, event venues, restaurants, cafes and bars from January 18.

But the plan would have obliged those who did not participate to stay at home for a week longer.

Opposition parties harshly criticised the scheme, questioning the point of one-off tests and asking how the restrictions could be enforced.

After a high volume of complaints overwhelmed the parliament website, all three opposition parties on Sunday announced that they would block the necessary legislation in the upper chamber.

"That means that exiting lockdown early through getting a test won't be possible," Health Minister Rudolf Anschober said on Monday morning.

Shops, restaurants and other services will therefore remain closed until January 24.

As long as the number of new infections per day doesn't come below 1,000, "there's no point discussing relaxation measures", Pamela Rendi-Wagner, head of the largest opposition Social Democrat (SPOe) party, said Sunday.

Currently, around 1,500 residents of the small, Alpine nation are testing positive per day.

The current, third lockdown came into effect on December 26, just

twenty days after the previous lockdown ended.

Austria was generally seen to have acted swiftly during the first wave of the pandemic, escaping its worst effects, but critics have accused the government of failing to adequately prepare for the second wave.

The country's per capita infection rates climbed to among the highest in the world in late November, outbreaks in elderly care facilities emerging as a particular problem in recent weeks.

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