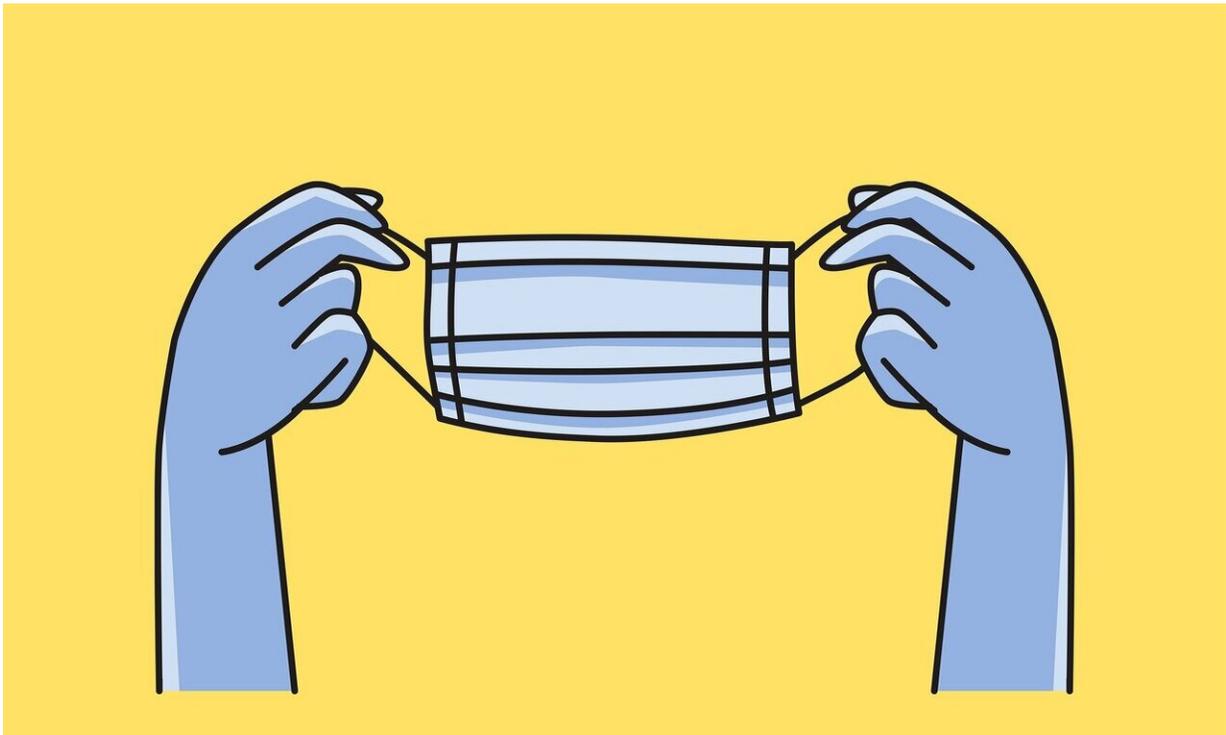


German agency slams too many 'exceptions' to virus rules

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Germany's Robert Koch Institute (RKI) health agency on Thursday called for stronger measures to bring down coronavirus infections, noting many people not doing enough to reduce social contacts.

"The measures that we are taking now—for me they are not a complete

lockdown, there are still too many exceptions," RKI head Lothar Wieler told a press conference in Berlin.

There is "total consensus" among statisticians that stricter measures would be needed to get "to a stage where the incidence rate is falling substantially and rapidly", the RKI's Dirk Brockmann added.

Germany has continued to see high infection rates despite being in some form of shutdown since the beginning of November.

The RKI on Thursday reported 25,164 new cases in 24 hours and a record 1,244 deaths, with many regions saying hospitals are struggling to cope with the influx of patients.

Bars, gyms, cultural and leisure centres were closed in early November, followed by non-essential shops in December.

Schools and daycares are also closed but are offering emergency daycare to parents who have no other options.

Authorities have also turned the screw on social gatherings, limiting contacts to two households and urging people to stay at home wherever possible.

But mobility has been significantly higher during the second shutdown than during the first round of restrictions in the spring, according to the RKI.

"There is a lot of common sense, but there are also a lot of exceptions, especially when it comes to mobility. People are on the road a lot," Brockmann said.

Scientists agree that "the rules that lead to fewer contacts simply have to

be tightened" in order to meaningfully bring down the incidence rate, he said.

Wieler urged companies to allow more staff to work from home whenever possible.

Germany, with 83 million people, began vaccinating against COVID-19 in late December and on Thursday passed the milestone of one percent of the population receiving their first jab, according to the RKI.

Regional poll delayed

The worsening pandemic on Thursday prompted German parties to agree to postpone a regional election in the eastern state of Thuringia, moving it from April 25 to September 26.

Thuringia is a current hotspot in the pandemic, recording 310 new cases per 100,000 people over the last seven days, compared with the national average of just over 150, according to the Robert Koch Institute for [disease control](#).

The regional vote will now coincide with Germany's [general election](#), the first in over 15 years that won't feature Chancellor Angela Merkel, who is bowing out of politics.

The Thuringian election was one of the first state polls scheduled for 2021, and was going to be closely watched as a test of the national mood heading into the post-Merkel era.

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