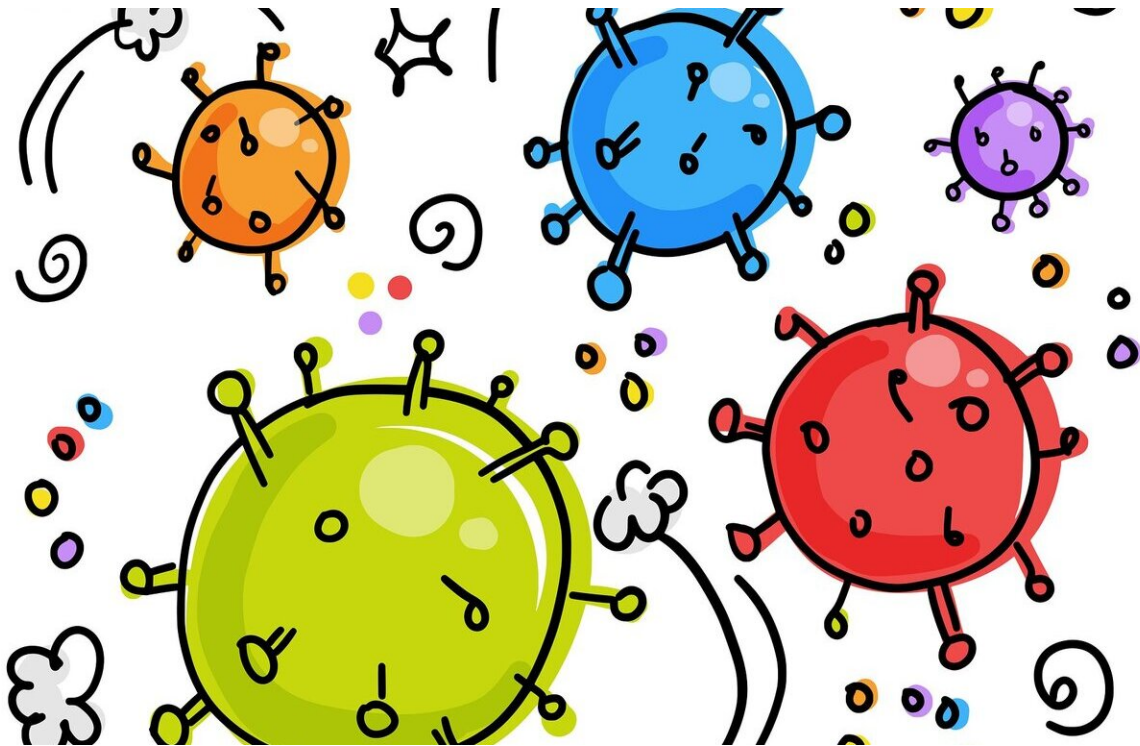


# Austria to ease third virus lockdown from February 8

February 2 2021

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Austria will start relaxing its third coronavirus lockdown from February 8, Chancellor Sebastian Kurz announced on Monday, with schools, museums and shops set to reopen.

The relaxation of restrictions, which have been in place since December

26, is being undertaken even though "we are far removed from our ideal scenario of a seven-day average of 50 new cases", Kurz told a press conference.

"For this reason only careful steps towards opening are possible," he said, speaking after a day of talks with scientists, the opposition and heads of regional governments.

He said that while from an epidemiological point of view the ideal course of action would be to continue the [lockdown](#), the [government](#) also had to consider wider social and psychological effects of lockdown.

School pupils will have to be tested every two days, with older pupils attending according to a rotating timetable.

Shops, museums and zoos will be able to reopen but customers and visitors will have to wear medical-grade face masks.

Services such as hairdressers and beauticians will also be allowed to reopen but customers will have to show proof of a negative [coronavirus](#) test.

Meetings of people from more than two households will once again be allowed but Kurz pleaded for [social contacts](#) to be kept to a minimum.

He said the government would re-assess the situation in two weeks to see if it would be possible to reopen restaurants and cafes or restart cultural events.

But he warned the government could also reintroduce restrictions if infection numbers get worse.

One of the few exceptions to the wide-ranging shutdown in recent weeks

has been [ski resorts](#), which have stayed open for local visitors despite several reported outbreaks.

While the country was spared in the first wave of the pandemic, it has been hard hit by the second and has suffered more than 7,800 deaths of people who have contracted the virus.

At the same time, frustration with lockdown measures has become ever more visible with some large demonstrations.

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