

Germany limits travel from French region over virus variant

February 28 2021



File picture taken Sept. 26, 2020 shows the Calmont vineyard standing over the Moselle loop in Bremm, Germany. The German disease control agency is adding France's Moselle region to its list of areas with a high rate of variant coronavirus cases, meaning travelers from there will face additional hurdles when crossing the border into neighboring Germany.(AP Photo/Michael Probst, file)

Germany announced Sunday that travelers from France's northeastern Moselle region will face additional restrictions because of the high rate of variant coronavirus cases there.

Germany's disease control agency, the Robert Koch Institute, said it would add Moselle to the list of "variant of concern" areas that already includes countries such as the Czech Republic, Portugal, the United Kingdom and parts of Austria.

Travelers from those areas must produce a recent negative coronavirus test before entering Germany.

The Moselle region in northeastern France includes the city of Metz and borders the German states of Saarland and Rhineland-Palatinate.

Clement Beaune, the French minister for European affairs, said France regrets the decision and is in negotiations with Germany to try to lighten the measures for 16,000 inhabitants of Moselle who work across the border. Specifically, he said France does not want them to face the daily PCR virus tests that Germany has applied elsewhere to travelers along some borders.

"We don't want that," he said.

Beaune said France is pushing for the use of easier, faster testing methods and for tests every 2-3 days rather than daily. More talks were expected later Sunday, he said.



Police officers address walkers around Hamburg's Outer Alster who do not adhere to the strict mask requirement in Hamburg, Germany, Sunday, Feb.28, 2021. In case of repetition, they can impose a fine. (Markus Scholz/dpa via AP)

The weekly rate of new infections in Moselle, at more than 300 per 100,000 people, is well above the average for France's eastern region and the national average. In Germany, the number of cases per week currently stands at almost 64 per 100,000 inhabitants.

The Robert Koch Institute recorded 7,890 newly confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Germany over the past day, taking the total to over 2.4 million cases. The death toll rose by 157 to 70,045.

German officials have warned that virus variants such as the one first

detected in Britain—known as B.1.1.7—could spread more easily and fuel the infection rate at a time when Germany is slowly relaxing its lockdown measures.

"There are two trains rushing toward each other," said Karl Lauterbach, an epidemiologist and lawmaker with the center-left Social Democrats.

He called for Germany to prioritize giving as many people as possible an initial vaccine dose, as some other countries have done, including with the AstraZeneca shot currently reserved for those under 65. Companies and schools should also carry out weekly tests, or more once possible, and those with a negative result should also be able to visit stores again.



AstraZeneca's vaccines are ready for Corona vaccination at the vaccination center. in Apolda, Germany, Sunday, Feb.28, 2021. A total of 5350 employees at

elementary and special schools as well as kindergartens are expected to receive their first Corona vaccination at the Thuringian vaccination centers today.
(Michael Reichel/dpa via AP)

Bavaria's governor, Markus Soeder, also urged a change to the way the AstraZeneca shot is used. The vaccine has been shunned by many hoping to get the shot made by German company BioNTech and Pfizer, or a similar one made by U.S. firm Moderna.

Soeder said Sunday it was "an absurd situation" that many who want to get vaccinated can't, while those who can don't want to.

"Whatever is left over should just be released," he said.

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