

Merkel says Germany past 'crest of 2nd wave,' urges patience

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Chancellor Angela Merkel said Thursday that Germany is over the peak of its latest surge in coronavirus cases but she wants to wait for data on the spread of new variants before deciding on lifting restrictions.

In an interview with German broadcaster RTL, Merkel said she warned months ago that the country faced a hard winter.

"And still we can say, the crest of the second wave has been passed," she said, adding that Germans need to "hold out a little longer" until vaccinations start having an effect on hospitalizations and the number of older people becoming seriously ill from COVID-19.

"I can see a light shining at the end of the tunnel," Merkel said. However, the chancellor also cautioned against "false hopes."

As Germany nears 60,000 confirmed deaths in the pandemic, Merkel said she wanted to wait for fresh data on the prevalence of new coronavirus variants in the country before deciding whether to discuss easing restrictions at a meeting with state governors Wednesday.

Schools, restaurants and most stores have been shut since December, helping push down the number of cases in many parts of Germany.

Merkel said 70 of the country's 401 regions saw the number of new cases go below the target threshold of 50 per 100,000 inhabitants in a week.

"We're going to get information at the end of the week or the beginning of next week on how widespread the mutation, this British virus, is," she said, referring to a variant that first appeared in England last year and which scientists say may spread more easily.

Merkel said she's had some restless nights trying to make decisions that affect the lives of millions, and cited a town hall meeting earlier Thursday in which she spoke to families struggling under the strain of the lockdown.

The veteran leader again defended the sluggish vaccine rollout in Germany, which has been blamed on slow regulatory approval and late orders by the European Union. About 14 million people across the

27-nation EU had received a first shot of a [coronavirus](#) vaccine by Wednesday, less than half the number who received an initial dose in the United States. Germany has vaccinated just over 2 million people so far.

Merkel noted that the U.S., which has numerous vaccine production sites, doesn't allow domestically produced doses to be exported, unlike in Europe, where some manufacturers' plants supply the rest of the world. The EU recently announced it, too, will tighten vaccine export rules.

In total, the EU has purchased enough [vaccine](#) to inoculate its 450 million inhabitants twice over, if all orders come through. Merkel acknowledged the slow start.

"I think we're going to catch up quite a bit," she said, adding that new mutations might require routine vaccinations in the future, similar to the flu.

Asked how she manages to keep her signature hairstyle in shape during the lockdown, which has led to the closure of hairdressers, Merkel acknowledged receiving "the help of an assistant."

"Of course, we adhere to all the hygiene requirements," she said. "And the fact that one slowly turns grey is something one has to live with. So I'm looking forward to hairdressers being able to open again."

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