

Locks down: German hairdressers reopen despite virus fears

March 1 2021, by Geir Moulson



A customer gets her hair colored by a hairdresser at a barber shop in Gelsenkirchen, Germany, Monday, March 1, 2021. Hairdressers across Germany have reopened for business this morning after a more than 2-month closure, another cautious step as the country balances a desire to loosen restrictions with concern about the impact of more contagious coronavirus variants. (AP Photo/Martin Meissner)

Germans flocked to the salons Monday as hairdressers across the country reopened after a 2½-month closure, another cautious step toward normality as Germany balances a desire to loosen restrictions with concerns about more contagious virus variants.

The move came after many German elementary students returned to school a week ago, following a decision by Chancellor Angela Merkel and Germany's 16 state governors. They will confer again on Wednesday to decide how to proceed with the rest of Germany's coronavirus restrictions, which at present run until Sunday.

Some German states also allowed businesses such as florists and hardware stores to open on Monday. Most stores have been closed nationwide since Dec. 16. Restaurants, bars, sports and leisure facilities have been closed since Nov. 2 and hotels are allowed only to accommodate business travelers.

At his Liebe zum Detail ("Love of Detail") salon in Cologne, manager Marc Nicolas Bruehl said he is fully booked for the next four weeks.

"There is a certain ambivalence about it, because on the one hand we are of course happy to be able to open up again and to earn money ourselves again," he said. "On the other hand, the increasing numbers and the emerging (virus) mutations are of course also something that concerns us."



Hairdresser Ute Augustin colors hair of a customer at a barber shop in Gelsenkirchen, Germany, Monday, March 1, 2021. Hairdressers across Germany have reopened for business this morning after a more than 2-month closure, another cautious step as the country balances a desire to loosen restrictions with concern about the impact of more contagious coronavirus variants. (AP Photo/Martin Meissner)

Customer Udo Matzka, 64, said he was "totally happy that I can be here today."

"I wouldn't have thought how systemically relevant a hairdresser can be," he said.

There are increasing calls for restrictions to be further relaxed, but also a

desire to remain cautious. A steady decline in daily new infections has stalled, and even been reversed in some areas, as a more contagious variant first discovered in Britain spreads.

"This week will set the course for the coming months," said Bavarian governor Markus Soeder, an advocate of a cautious approach. He called the virus situation "unstable" and said authorities must not "fly blind into a third wave."

"It's really important that we make smart decisions this week," he said. "Smart decisions means that the mood must be taken on board—we must find the right balance between caution and opening, and we absolutely must not lose our nerves ... and simply fulfill all wishes."



Muhammet 'Memo' Akbas cuts Aleksandar Petrovic's hair in a barber shop in Freiburg, Germany, Monday, March 1, 2021. Hairdressers across Germany are reopening for business after a two and a half month closure, another cautious step as the country balances a desire to loosen restrictions with concern about the impact of more contagious coronavirus variants. (Philipp von Ditfurth/dpa via AP)

Germany's disease control center reported 4,732 new coronavirus cases over the past 24 hours and another 60 deaths, bringing Germany's overall pandemic death toll to 70,105. The number of new cases over seven days stood at nearly 66 per 100,000 residents—far below its peak of nearly 200 just before Christmas but also well above the level of 35 at which, under existing plans, the government wanted to loosen rules further.

Germany had given 4.9% of its population a first vaccine shot as of Sunday, while 2.5% had received a second jab—relatively slow progress that has drawn sharp criticism.

Bavaria and two neighboring states, meanwhile, plan to give 15,000 vaccine doses to the neighboring Czech Republic, which currently has the highest infection rate in the 27-nation European Union.

Soeder said the "symbolic measure" ultimately helps Germany, because Czech authorities want to use it in high-risk areas near the border and vaccinate cross-border commuters.



Hairdresser Frank Schaefer works on the hair of the first customer in the beauty salon 'Frank and Amanda' at the district in Prenzlauer Berg in Berlin, Germany, Monday, March 1, 2021. Hairdressers across Germany have reopened for business this morning after a more than 2-month closure, another cautious step as the country balances a desire to loosen restrictions with concern about the impact of more contagious coronavirus variants. (Jens Kalaene/dpa via AP)



Marco Trapani is standing next to one of his first customers shortly after midnight in Dortmund, Germany early morning March 1, 2021. After about a two-and-a-half-month of closing to battle the coronavirus pandemic, the first hairdressers return to work at night night. (Bernd Thissen/dpa via AP)



Hairdresser Holger Augustin cuts hair of a customer at his barber shop in Gelsenkirchen, Germany, Monday, March 1, 2021. Hairdressers across Germany have reopened for business this morning after a more than 2-month closure, another cautious step as the country balances a desire to loosen restrictions with concern about the impact of more contagious coronavirus variants. (AP Photo/Martin Meissner)



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Customers buy flowers at a garden center in Munich, Germany, Monday, March 1, 2021. Some German federal states are allowing businesses such as flower shops and hardware stores another cautious step as the country balances a desire to loosen restrictions with concern about the impact of more contagious coronavirus variants. (Peter Kneffel/dpa via AP)

He also suggested that virus hotspots along the border should receive a greater share of available tests and vaccines to help contain the spread there.

Most of the German counties with high infection rates are near the Czech border.

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