

Officials urge vigilance as Germany sees 3rd infection wave

March 26 2021, by David Rising



Germany's Health Minister Jens Spahn, left, and Lothar Wieler, the head of Germany's Robert Koch Institute (RKI) for disease control attend a news conference on the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in Berlin, Germany March 26, 2021. (Hannibal Hanschke/Pool via AP)

German health officials warned Friday that the country's latest eruption

of coronavirus cases has the potential to be worse than the previous two last year, and they urged people to stay at home during the upcoming Easter break to help slow the rapidly rising numbers of new infections.

Health Minister Jens Spahn told reporters that more than 10% of Germans had now received at least a first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine and that the rollout of shots, which has been criticized as too slow, was gathering speed.

At the same time, Spahn urged people to get tested regularly, observe hygiene and distancing recommendations and to avoid contact with large groups of people.

"The numbers are rising too quickly," he said. "If this continues unchecked, there's a danger that our health system will in April, during the course of April, be stretched to its limit."

Lothar Wieler, head of Germany's disease control center, the Robert Koch Institute, said that Germany is just at the "beginning of the third wave" of the pandemic. He said the more contagious variant of the virus first detected in Britain is now the dominant one in the country.

"It's more contagious and more dangerous, and thus more difficult to stop," Wieler said. "There are clear signals that this wave could be even worse than the first two waves."



Jens Spahn, Federal Minister of Health, arrives for a press conference on the Corona situation before Easter in Berlin, Germany, Friday, March 26, 2021. (Kay Nietfeld/dpa via AP)

The number of new weekly infections per 100,000 people was around 70 two weeks ago, compared to 119 on Friday, he said. Germany reported 21,573 new cases on Friday, compared to a daily number of 17,482 a week earlier.

"All the indicators at the moment point toward it getting worse in the coming weeks," Wieler said.

He said if Germans used the Easter period to further reduce contact, it would at least be possible to lessen the severity of a third wave.

"We can't stop this wave anymore, but we must try to flatten it as strongly as possible," Wieler said. "Therefore, we have to reduce infections with all methods we have available."

Germany plans to start requiring negative test results from all airline passengers entering the country from abroad. The requirement was set to take effect on Sunday but it was pushed back to Monday night to give airlines more time to prepare, Spahn said.



Germany's Health Minister Jens Spahn, right, talks to Lothar Wieler, the head of Germany's Robert Koch Institute (RKI) for disease control after a news conference on the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in Berlin, Germany March 26, 2021. (Hannibal Hanschke/Pool via AP)



Jens Spahn, Federal Minister of Health, left, and Lothar Wieler, President of the Robert Koch Institute, arrive for the press conference on the Corona situation before Easter in Berlin, Germany, Friday, March 26, 2021. (Kay Nietfeld/dpa via AP)



Germany's Health Minister Jens Spahn arrives for a news conference on the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in Berlin, Germany March 26, 2021. (Hannibal Hanschke/Pool via AP)



The honored Peggy Schirmer-Schmid, left, speaks to German President Frank Walter Steinmeier, center, during a ceremony to honor people for their services during the coronavirus pandemic with state's cross of merit at Bellevue Palace in Berlin, Germany, Friday, March 26, 2021. (AP Photo/Markus Schreiber, Pool)

Through at least May 12, all travelers will have to show a negative test result from within the previous 48 hours before boarding planes to Germany.

Spahn said the measure was meant to reduce the possibility of infections being brought in, but alone was not a "game changer for the Easter holidays."

A spokesman for German Chancellor Angela Merkel declined to say

whether she would be traveling to her holiday home north of Berlin for Easter. But spokesman Steffen Seibert said that, speaking in general terms, "the chancellor will certainly adhere to all the recommendations that apply to us all."

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