

Germany needs lower virus numbers for 'carefree summer': minister

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Germany needs to stay vigilant and further bring down the number of coronavirus infections if the country is to enjoy a "carefree summer" and large-scale reopenings, Health Minister Jens Spahn said Sunday.

"The weather is improving, the number of vaccinations is rising, [infection](#) rates are falling. The restrictions will fall one by one," Spahn

told the Bild am Sonntag newspaper.

"And that's incredibly important after the long, dark winter months. But for a carefree summer, we need to lower the incidence rate even further," he said.

Germany has in recent weeks managed to break a third wave of the pandemic after imposing strict nationwide curbs and picking up the pace of vaccinations.

The closely watched seven-day incidence rate in the European Union's most populous country has fallen from 169 new infections per 100,000 people in late April to 64.5 on Sunday.

Germany's 16 regional states have started relaxing restrictions, with some reopening beer gardens, hotels and swimming pools while others are bringing pupils back to school full-time.

But Spahn warned against opening up too soon.

"Caution and vigilance remain the order of the day," he told Bild.

"Last summer the incidence rate was below 20. We should aim for that again."

The minister also said Germany had to learn lessons from the summer of 2020, when returning holidaymakers led to a surge in COVID-19 cases.

Spahn said special attention should be paid to trips by people visiting relatives in Turkey and Balkan countries, which at one point last year "accounted for around 50 percent of all new infections" in Germany.

"We must prevent that this year," he said, stressing the importance of

mandatory coronavirus tests.

"We want to strike early agreements with countries like Turkey about tests on arrival and departure," he added.

Looking ahead to the new school year, Spahn said Germany would start inoculating 12- to 15-year-olds as soon as European regulators approve the Pfizer/BioNTech jab for those ages, which he expects to happen "soon".

"The goal is then for regional states to offer (those) pupils a jab before the end of August."

Germany has recorded more than 3.6 million [coronavirus](#) cases since the start of the pandemic, adding another 6,714 new cases over the last 24 hours, according to the Robert Koch health agency.

More than 87,000 people have died so far.

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