

Merkel tells Germans to get vaccinated for 'more freedom'

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German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Jens Spahn, Federal Minister of Health, and Lothar Wieler, President of the Robert Koch Institute (RKI), from right, prepare for a picture in front of the entrance to the RKI in Berlin, Germany, Tuesday, July 13, 2021. Merkel visited the health ministry's leading institute in the Corona pandemic at the invitation of Health Minister Spahn. Credit: Michael Kappeler/Pool via AP

Chancellor Angela Merkel on Tuesday urged Germany's residents to get vaccinated against COVID-19, saying the more people get shots "the more free we will be again."

Vaccination rates in Germany have slowed in recent weeks. About 58.7% of the population has received at least one shot and 43% is fully vaccinated, according to official figures.

The country's disease control agency said last week that the country should aim to vaccinate 85% of people ages 12-59 and 90% of people over 60 to prevent the delta variant from causing a resurgence of coronavirus cases this fall and winter.

Merkel, who has received both shots, called on people to get vaccinated to protect themselves and others from serious illness as a result of a coronavirus infection. She linked higher immunization rates with the further easing of pandemic restrictions.

"The more people are vaccinated, the more free we will be again, the more freely we will be able to live again," she told reporters during a visit to the Robert Koch Institute, the government run disease control agency.

Germany has relaxed many restrictions on social gatherings in recent months, but people are still required to show negative test results or vaccine certificates to dine indoors and attend indoor events where capacity is limited. Masks are still required in most stores.



German Chancellor Angela Merkel, center, stands next to Jens Spahn, Federal Minister of Health, and Lothar Wieler, President of the Robert Koch Institute (RKI), left, for a picture in front of the entrance to the RKI in Berlin, Germany, Tuesday, July 13, 2021. Merkel visited the health ministry's leading institute in the Corona pandemic at the invitation of Health Minister Spahn. Credit: Michael Kappeler/Pool via AP



German Chancellor Angela Merkel stands up with mask after the press conference following her visit to the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) in Berlin, Germany, Tuesday, July 13, 2021. Merkel visited the health ministry's leading institute in the Corona pandemic at the invitation of Health Minister Spahn. Credit: Michael Kappeler/Pool via AP



German Chancellor Angela Merkel leaves a press conference following her visit to the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) in Berlin, Germany, Tuesday, July 13, 2021. Merkel visited the health ministry's leading institute in the Corona pandemic at the invitation of Health Minister Spahn. Credit: Michael Kappeler/Pool via AP

Asked whether Germany might introduce compulsory vaccinations for certain professions, [as France is doing for health workers](#), Merkel suggested that it wouldn't be effective but didn't rule out the possibility.

"I'm not ruling out that this might be talked about differently in a few months either," she said. "But at the moment we have said we don't want compulsory vaccinations, we want to promote vaccinations."

Lothar Wieler, the head of the Robert Koch Institute, said studies show more than 90% of people in Germany are willing to get vaccinated.

Authorities are increasingly trying to offer shots in churches, mosques, supermarket parking lots and sports facilities to reach people who have so far hesitated to go to doctors' offices or special vaccine centers.

Merkel warned that [rising case numbers](#) would increase the risk of new, more aggressive variants developing. She called on Germans to continue wearing masks, maintaining social distance, getting tested when indicated and agreeing to other "very low-level interventions that we strongly advocate so that other encroachments on freedoms don't have to happen."

The chancellor noted that the Dutch government [recently acknowledged](#) it had relaxed its remaining pandemic restrictions too soon only to see [infections skyrocket in the Netherlands](#).

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