

German health minister seeks to step up booster shots

November 3 2021



German Health Minister Jens Spahn attends a news conference about the COVID-19 situation in Germany in Berlin, Germany, Wednesday, Nov. 3, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Markus Schreiber, Pool

Germany's health minister called Wednesday for booster vaccinations to

be stepped up and for more frequent checks of people's vaccination or test status as new COVID-19 infections increase.

Senior [health](#) officials also appealed anew to German residents who haven't yet been vaccinated at all to get their shots, though Health Minister Jens Spahn acknowledged that many of the holdouts can't be convinced. They said that pressure on hospital beds is rising, particularly in regions where [vaccination rates](#) are relatively low.

Spahn said that although officials agreed in August to make [booster](#) shots available to over-60s and nursing home residents and staff, only a bit over 2 million have been administered so far.

"That is much too few—the pace of boosters is not sufficient," he added.

There is some tension between the minister and doctors' organizations over the issue. Germany's independent standing committee on vaccination—whose recommendations are followed by many doctors—currently recommends boosters for over-70s and a few other groups, but the [health ministry](#) says everyone who wants one is entitled to one.

"If every country waited for data before they do anything, we wouldn't have any data," Spahn said, noting that boosters have been cleared by European authorities and vaccinations of teenagers also were started well before a recommendation from the committee. He said the most at-risk should take priority, but as far as others are concerned "the [vaccine](#) is there, the clearance is there and findings from other countries are there."



A woman walks past an abandoned coronavirus test center in Frankfurt, Tuesday, Nov. 2, 2021. Numbers of coronavirus infections are rising again in Germany. Credit: AP Photo/Michael Probst



German Chancellor Angela Merkel sits at the weekly cabinet meeting in the Chancellor's Office and puts on her mask, which she had briefly removed earlier, Wednesday, Nov.3, 2021. Credit: John Macdougall/Pool via AP

Official figures show that about two-thirds of Germany's population of 83 million has completed its first round of vaccination. The head of the country's disease control center, Lothar Wieler, said that 16.2 million people age 12 or above remain unvaccinated—including 3.2 million over-60s.

Germany hasn't made coronavirus vaccinations obligatory for any professional groups, unlike some of its European counterparts. But regional governments have limited access to some indoor events and facilities to people who have been vaccinated, have recently recovered or

been tested, and some are tightening those rules.

Checks are often lax at best.

"If my vaccination certificate is checked more often in one day in Rome than it sometimes is in four weeks in Germany, then I think more can be done," Spahn said. He also called for obligatory testing across Germany of nursing home staff and visitors, including those who have been vaccinated.

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