

Germany sees surge in COVID cases, mulls new restrictions

November 17 2021, by Frank Jordans



A medical worker carries out a rapid test in a test mobile in Frankfurt, early Wednesday, Nov. 17, 2021. Numbers of the coronavirus infections in Germany reached a new record high on Wednesday. Credit: AP Photo/Michael Probst

Germany's disease control agency reported 52,826 new coronavirus cases Wednesday—a number that has roughly doubled in two weeks—stoking calls for fresh measures to curb the country's steadily rising infections.

The Robert Koch Institute said 294 more people died in Germany of COVID-19 in the last day, bringing the country's pandemic death toll to 98,274. The number of infections recorded since the start of the pandemic has reached almost 5.13 million.

"The current pandemic situation in Germany is dramatic, I can't say it any other way," outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel said. "The fourth wave is hitting our country with full force."

The World Health Organization on Tuesday also cited Germany, along with Russia and Britain, as the countries with the most new cases in Europe.

The three political parties negotiating to form Germany's next government have agreed on a series of public health measures for parliament to debate on Thursday, German news agency dpa reported.

They include stricter anti-virus workplace rules and sharply increasing the penalties for forging vaccine passports or test certificates to allow up to five years in prison for professional gangs selling such fakes, according to dpa. Employees would also get the right to work from home again, where possible.



An empty street leads to the banking district in Frankfurt, early Wednesday, Nov. 17, 2021. Numbers of corona infections in Germany reached a new record high on Wednesday. Credit: AP Photo/Michael Probst

Infections have shot up in recent weeks, particularly among unvaccinated people, with southern and eastern Germany the hardest hit.

The district of Meissen, near Dresden, reported almost 1,305 new cases per 100,000 inhabitants in the past week. Saxony state, where Meissen is located, plans to introduce new social distancing rules and to require people to show vaccine passports or recovery certificates to enter all stores except supermarkets and pharmacies.

Saxony has the lowest vaccination rate in Germany, with 57.6% of the population fully vaccinated compared to the national average of 67.7%

Merkel plans to meet Thursday with the governors of Germany's 16 states to coordinate the country's response to the latest surge in infections.

"The meeting is overdue," Merkel said, adding that she hoped officials would agree on a threshold for imposing additional measures that takes into account how many COVID-19 patients are hospitalized.



Cars drive on a road with tram rails in Frankfurt, early Wednesday, Nov. 17, 2021. Numbers of coronavirus infections in Germany reached a new record high on Wednesday. Credit: AP Photo/Michael Probst



A medical worker prepares rapid test kits in a test mobile in Frankfurt, early Wednesday, Nov. 17, 2021. Numbers of the coronavirus infections in Germany reached a new record high on Wednesday. Credit: AP Photo/Michael Probst

"It would be a disaster to act only when the intensive care units are full, because then it would be too late," she said in a speech to mayors from across Germany.

Her likely successor, current Finance Minister Olaf Scholz of the center-left Social Democrats, urged people who haven't been vaccinated yet to do so.

"That's the best protection against infection," he told reporters. "We can see that, right now, in intensive care units."

German Health Minister Jens Spahn has called on doctors not to be too strict about waiting at least six months before giving patients vaccine booster shots.

Meanwhile, authorities in neighboring Austria have said travelers will need to show a negative PCR test upon entering the country; previously, the cheaper lateral flow tests were allowed. The Alpine nation on Monday implemented a nationwide lockdown for unvaccinated people who haven't recently had COVID-19.

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