

# Health minister tells Germans: Get vaccinated or get COVID

November 22 2021, by Frank Jordans

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Teacher Joschka Dusil and students of classes 1, 2 and 4 of the Liebenauschule school learn during an afternoon lesson in the program "Learning with Tailwind" in Neckartailfingen, Germany, Thursday, Nov. 18, 2021. The two-year program is designed to help children and young people overcome corona episodes and learning gaps. Credit: Marijan Murat/dpa via AP

Germany's health minister said Monday that the rapid rise in coronavirus cases means it's likely everyone in the country who isn't vaccinated will have caught COVID-19 by the end of the winter—and some of those will die.

Official figures Monday showed more than 30,000 newly confirmed cases in Germany over the past 24 hours—an increase of about 50% compared to one week ago. The country is this week expected to pass 100,000 coronavirus-related deaths since the start of the pandemic.

Hospitals warn that ICU capacities are nearly exhausted, with some patients having to be transferred to clinics in other parts of Germany.

To reduce the risk of serious illness, Health Minister Jens Spahn urged Germans to get vaccinated, including with booster shots if their first round of inoculation occurred more than six months ago.

"By the end of this winter pretty much everyone in Germany (...) will have been vaccinated, recovered or died," Spahn told reporters in Berlin.

He acknowledged that some would consider this view to be cynical. "But it's true. With the highly contagious delta variant this is very, very likely and that's why we are recommending vaccination so urgently," said Spahn.

Spahn said some 50 million doses of the Moderna and BioNtech-Pfizer vaccines will be made available for the rest of the year to allow people to get first, second or third shots, as necessary. To achieve this, Germany is holding back tens of millions of doses originally intended for poor countries. Those missing doses will be provided at a later date, he said.



German Health Minister Jens Spahn briefs the media about the vaccination campaign against the coronavirus and the COVID-19 disease in Berlin, Germany, Monday, Nov. 22, 2021. Background reads: 'Federal Press Conference'. Credit: AP Photo/Markus Schreiber

Some politicians in Germany have suggested the country may need to consider compulsory vaccinations, like its neighbor Austria.

About 68% of Germany's population of 83 million has been fully vaccinated. The German government has said it wants to push that rate above 75% to effectively curb the spread of the virus, but a sizeable minority in the population has resisted calls to take the shot.

Karl Lauterbach, a prominent lawmaker with the center-left Social

Democrats, called for a "radical" application of rules requiring people to present vaccination or recovery certificates to access some stores and public places.

"A general vaccine mandate (shouldn't be) taboo either," he said on Twitter.

Bavaria's conservative governor, Markus Soeder, said Monday that he favors mandatory vaccines for all, too.

Soeder acknowledged that such a move would infringe on civil liberties, but argued that this needed to be balanced against the need to protect the health of the population and preserve other freedoms.





German Health Minister Jens Spahn briefs the media about the vaccination campaign against the coronavirus and the COVID-19 disease in Berlin, Germany, Monday, Nov. 22, 2021. Background reads: 'Federal Press Conference'. Credit: AP Photo/Markus Schreiber

"That's why we believe that only a general vaccine mandate offers a durable solution," he said.

But a spokesman for outgoing German Chancellor Angela Merkel made clear that her government had no plans to tackle the thorny issue of vaccine mandates.

"There is no decision about this now and it wouldn't be taken by this government anymore," Steffen Seibert told reporters in Berlin.

A center-left coalition of three parties is expected to finalize negotiations on forming a government in early December.

Bavaria, which required all citizens to get vaccinated against smallpox in 1807, currently has the second-highest COVID-19 infection rates behind Saxony to the northeast. The doctors' association there said Saxony needs to prepare for a system of triage to manage the few remaining ICU beds in the state.

Gernot Marx, the head of Germany's intensive care association DIVI, said many hospitals in hard-hit regions have begun postponing scheduled surgery.



Jens Spahn, Federal Minister of Health, sits in his limousine after a press conference on corona vaccinations with Moderna and Biontech/Pfizer vaccines in Berlin, Germany, Monday, Nov. 22, 2021. Credit: Michael Kappeler/dpa via AP

He noted that the country has about 4,000 fewer ICU beds available than a year ago because large numbers of medical staff quit their jobs because of the intense strain of working during the pandemic.

A senior doctor at Berlin's Charite hospital, Steffen Weber-Carstens, said the city of 3.6 million had only 89 free ICU beds left Monday.

Despite high infection rates among children, schools remain open in Germany.

Spahn, the health minister, said he expects the European Union to approve vaccines against COVID-19 for children aged 5-11 at the end of the week.

The EU will begin shipping vaccines adjusted for younger children on Dec. 20, with Germany initially getting 2.4 million doses, he said.

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