

Austria to end lockdown on Sunday but not for unvaccinated

December 8 2021, by Kirsten Grieshaber



New Chancellor of the People's Party Karl Nehammer, left, and his predecessor Alexander Schallenberg arrive for the swearing-in ceremony at Hofburg Palace in Vienna, Austria, Monday, Dec. 6, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Lisa Leutner

Austria's fourth national lockdown of the pandemic will end on Sunday

but lockdown restrictions will remain for unvaccinated people, the country's new chancellor said Wednesday.

Chancellor Karl Nehammer said the end of the lockdown will be a "opening with a seatbelt," meaning some measures—such as an obligation to wear masks on public transportation and inside stores and [public spaces](#)—will stay in place also for people who are vaccinated or have recovered from COVID-19. There will also be an 11 p.m. curfew for restaurants and limits on the number of people attending cultural events.

Stricter measures can be implemented independently by regions that are especially affected by the pandemic, Nehammer said.

Nehammer stressed that [unvaccinated people](#) could end their lockdowns immediately by getting the jab, but also acknowledged that "it still takes a lot of convincing to get those who haven't even been vaccinated yet."

"The lockdown for the unvaccinated continues. I also understand that the people who are affected by it feel aggrieved," Nehammer told reporters in Vienna. "At the same time, there is the offer of science, that by getting vaccinated these troubles can be quickly put aside and that then common freedom can actually be lived together."



A person walks by a closed christmas market in Vienna, Austria, Tuesday, Nov. 30, 2021. As countries shut their doors to foreign tourists or reimpose restrictions because of the new omicron variant of the coronavirus, tourism that was just finding it's footing again could face another major pandemic slowdown amid the uncertainty about the new strain. Credit: AP Photo/Lisa Leutner, File

Austria has a relatively low vaccination rate for Western Europe, with just 67.7% of the population fully vaccinated. Tens of thousands have protested across the Alpine nation in recent weeks against the lockdown and the upcoming vaccine mandate.

The government announced last month that it would implement a vaccine mandate early next year and said Wednesday that details about the compulsory vaccinations will be presented later this week.

Under the lockdown, which started on Nov. 22, [people](#) were allowed to leave their homes only for specific reasons, including buying groceries, going to the doctor or exercising. Day care centers and schools remained open for those who need them, but parents were asked to keep children at home if possible.

The country's seven-day infection rate declined by about half during the lockdown. It stood at 535.6 cases per 100,000 residents on Tuesday, down from more than 1,100 on the day the [lockdown](#) started.



The new Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer speaks at a news conference about his upcoming plans for the next weeks in Vienna, Austria, Tuesday, Dec. 7, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Lisa Leutner



A person goes by bike along the Danube Canal during the lockdown in Vienna, Austria, Tuesday, Dec. 7, 2021. A graffiti on the wall in the back says 'my body, my choice'. Credit: AP Photo/Lisa Leutner



A child looks at her band aid after receiving the vaccination against the COVID-19 virus in Tulln, a city close from Vienna, Austria, Wednesday, Dec. 1, 2021. Austria's lockdown has officially been extended until Dec. 11 as planned amid signs that the measures are helping to bring down a sky-high coronavirus infection rate. A parliamentary committee signed off Tuesday on the extension of the country's fourth national lockdown of the pandemic that started on Nov. 22. Credit: AP Photo/Lisa Leutner



A child receives the vaccination against the COVID-19 virus in Tulln, a city close from Vienna, Austria, Wednesday, Dec. 1, 2021. Austria's lockdown has officially been extended until Dec. 11 as planned amid signs that the measures are helping to bring down a sky-high coronavirus infection rate. A parliamentary committee signed off Tuesday on the extension of the country's fourth national lockdown of the pandemic that started on Nov. 22. Credit: AP Photo/Lisa Leutner



The new Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer speaks at a news conference about his plans for the upcoming weeks in Vienna, Austria, Tuesday, Dec. 7, 2021. Austria's new chancellor says the country's fourth national lockdown will end on Sunday, Dec. 12, 2021 but that lockdown restrictions will remain in place for the unvaccinated. Credit: AP Photo/Lisa Leutner, File



The Christmas tree of the closed Christmas market is reflected in a puddle in Innsbruck, Austria, Monday, Nov. 29, 2021. As countries shut their doors to foreign tourists or reimpose restrictions because of the new omicron variant of the coronavirus, tourism that was just finding it's footing again could face another major pandemic slowdown amid the uncertainty about the new strain. Credit: Photo/Michael Probst, File

Nehammer was sworn in Monday as Austria's third chancellor in two months, capping a round of upheaval triggered by the decision last week of Sebastian Kurz, the country's dominant political figure of recent years, to bow out of politics.

Nehammer, 49, has been Austria's interior minister since early 2020. He

also is taking over as leader of the conservative Austrian People's Party, which Kurz led to election victories in 2017 and 2019.

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