

Austria tamps down New Year's Eve parties to fight omicron

December 22 2021



A man receives a COVID-19 vaccine on the second day of a national lockdown to combat soaring coronavirus infections, in Vienna, Austria, Nov. 23, 2021. The government announced last month that it would implement a general vaccine mandate early next year, becoming the first European country to do so. Credit: AP Photo/Vadim Ghirda, File

Austria announced a slate of new restrictions Wednesday aimed at slowing the spread of the omicron variant, including closing restaurants earlier and imposing stricter entry requirements for people from countries where the variant is already dominant.

"Omicron presents us with the next epidemiological challenge," Katharina Reich, co-leader of the country's new coronavirus crisis team, said after a meeting between national leaders and state governors. "What we do know is that omicron is fast and we need to react quickly."

Austria is in a better position than many other European countries when it comes to confronting the new variant. Facing a massive surge of infections in November, the country imposed a three-week lockdown to bring its daily case numbers down.

As a result of those restrictions, which ended for vaccinated [people](#) on Dec. 12 but remain for those who have not been vaccinated, case numbers are still dropping.

On Wednesday, the country's 7-day rate of new infections stood at 188.1 per 100,000 inhabitants, down from a high of 1,100 per 100,000 in late November.

Despite the country's current "good position," Reich said new restrictions are necessary because [omicron](#) "will bring drastic changes to us as well."

Starting on Dec. 27, restaurants must close at 10 p.m., including on New Year's Eve. Reich also urged people to rethink their New Year's celebrations: "Celebrate New Year's Eve in [small groups](#)," she said.



People hold candles, in memory of those who have died in Austria of coronavirus, in Vienna, Sunday, Dec. 19, 2021. Tens of thousands of Vienna residents turned out Sunday night to participate in a "sea of lights" commemorating the more than 13,000 Austrians who have died in the coronavirus pandemic. The event, which was supported by dozens of community and civil society organizations, drew more than 30,000 people, according to Austrian media. Credit: AP Photo/Michael Gruber

In addition, officials said they would impose new limits and requirements for large gatherings, which will require proof that attendees are vaccinated or recently recovered.

Indoor and outdoor gatherings without assigned seating will be capped at 25 people. With assigned seating and masks, that number rises to 500; with an additional PCR test, to 1,000. Events at which all attendees have

received a vaccine booster dose can handle up to 2,000 people.

Austria also added four European countries—the U.K., Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway—to its list of "virus [variant](#) areas," which comes with stricter entry requirements.

Those who have received a booster vaccine and come with a recent negative PCR test will be allowed entry from those countries without quarantining. Austrian and EU citizens who do not meet those requirements will still be allowed to enter, but will face a mandatory 10-day quarantine.

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