

# Austria hits two-month low in virus cases as country reopens

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Austria reported fewer than 2,000 new coronavirus cases, the lowest number since October, as the last few regions in the country reopened restaurants and hotels on Monday.

Austria saw 1,792 new infections in 24 hours, down from daily highs of around 13,000 daily cases in late November—a trend that stands in

contrast to rising cases across much of Europe.

In response to a major surge of infections, the small Alpine nation went into a 20-day lockdown on Nov. 22. National lockdown restrictions were lifted for vaccinated people on Dec. 12, but remain in place for unvaccinated people.

Since Dec. 12, each of Austria's nine states has set its own policy regarding reopening: In some states, restaurants and hotels reopened immediately, while in others they remained closed a few days longer.

The capital, Vienna, opted to open shops and Christmas markets last week, but kept restaurants and hotels closed until Monday.

The latest case numbers show the benefit of the lockdown, especially as the omicron variant has led to rising cases elsewhere across Europe. Austria's seven-day rate of new infections now stands at 215 per 100,000 inhabitants, compared with a high of 1,100 per 100,000 late last month.

In addition, the number of patients in intensive care units has also dropped, although more slowly than the case numbers. There are 475 people being treated in ICUs, down from a high of 664 in early December.

As the country reopens domestically, Austrian officials have introduced stricter travel restrictions for those entering from abroad, to slow the spread of the omicron variant.

Starting early Monday, travelers to Austria must show proof of either vaccination or recovery to enter the country. In addition, two doses of vaccine is no longer considered sufficient for entry: Travelers must either show proof of a third dose or a PCR test.

Austrian citizens, residents and European Union citizens can still enter without proof of vaccination or recovery, but face a mandatory 10-day quarantine on arrival.

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