

Germany passes job requirement for health workers

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Germany on Friday passed legislation requiring healthcare workers to get inoculated against COVID-19, a first step toward possible mandatory jobs for all adults.

A large majority of Bundestag lower house MPs voted for the measure requiring staff at hospitals, doctors' offices and [care homes](#) to be fully vaccinated by mid-March 2022, which was then approved by the Bundesrat upper house.

The decision follows similar moves by France, Italy, Britain and Greece.

Health Minister Karl Lauterbach, who took office this week with the new government under Olaf Scholz, asked deputies from across the [political spectrum](#) to support the measure to protect vulnerable groups.

"The pandemic is a mission for us all—this isn't a moment for party politics," he told the chamber before the vote.

He said he hoped Germany could break a vicious fourth wave of the outbreak by the end of the month so that people could visit their families over the holidays.

"That's what we're fighting for," he said, stressing the need to slow the spread of the Delta virus variant and stop the Omicron strain from gaining ground.

Scholz, who took power on Wednesday, has come out strongly in favour of mandatory vaccinations after the voluntary campaign fell short with just under 70 percent of the population fully inoculated. Around 21 percent have received a booster shot.

Expanding the mandate to the [general public](#) would see the country follow the example of neighbouring Austria, which is requiring vaccinations from February.

Majority supports mandate

Angela Merkel's previous government had always ruled out mandatory vaccination, but calls for action have grown louder in Germany as [infection rates](#) hit record highs and hospitals buckle under the strain.

Around 89 percent of German care home staff and 90 percent of medical workers are fully vaccinated, according to an official estimate from October, but with wide variation among regions.

"Mandatory vaccination is a really difficult issue," Markus Heim, a senior doctor in the intensive care unit at Munich's Rechts der Isar hospital, told AFP.

"Everyone who works in the medical sector wants more people to be inoculated and if that can be achieved by requiring it then a lot of people working here would support it."

Mandatory jabs are now backed by politicians from across the spectrum and Scholz aims to have a policy in force by February or March to head off a possible fifth wave of infections.

A clear majority of Germans also supports the move, with 68 percent telling public broadcaster ZDF in a poll published Friday that they

support a general requirement.

The country recorded 61,288 new infections in the past 24 hours on Friday and 484 deaths, according to the Robert Koch Institute health agency. Nearly 105,000 people have died with coronavirus.

Earlier this month, Germany moved to shut off large parts of public life to people who have not been vaccinated or have not recovered from COVID-19.

It includes a blanket ban on entering bars, restaurants and cinemas for anyone who is unvaccinated or not recovered from coronavirus.

Several hard-hit German regions have already cancelled Christmas markets and barred the unvaccinated from public spaces like gyms and leisure facilities to slow the pandemic's spread.

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