

Germany must prepare for 'massive' new Omicron wave

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Germany, battered by a recent rise in COVID cases, must brace for a "massive fifth wave" due to the new Omicron variant, Health Minister Karl Lauterbach said Friday.

"We must prepare for a challenge that we have not yet had in this form," Lauterbach told reporters, adding that even if the [variant](#) were "milder" it may make "no difference".

Were the virus to be less serious than other variants, this might "keep deaths low for two to three weeks, before the growth of the virus would eat up this advantage," the minister said, underlining that a difficult period ahead was "inevitable".

Germany has reimposed health restrictions following high case numbers, barring unvaccinated people from restaurants and non-essential commerce.

Case numbers have declined slightly but the spread of the more infectious Omicron variant, first identified in South Africa, threatens to send new infections up again.

Governments around the world are scrambling to speed up booster vaccination campaigns to increase individuals' protection against the highly mutated virus.

Lauterbach said on Thursday Germany had secured approval from the EU to bring forward the delivery of 35 million doses of the Moderna vaccine to boost supplies.

The government has also placed an advance order for 80 million doses of Omicron-specific vaccines being developed by Pfizer and BioNTech.

Germany on Friday reported over 50,000 new cases in the last 24 hours, according to the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) health agency.

This figure is not going down quickly enough, given the pressure already on intensive care units and the arrival of Omicron, the RKI said,

describing the current course as "very concerning".

The proportion of the population to have already received two doses of the vaccine in Germany surpassed 70 percent this week.

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