

Germany keeps COVID restrictions as omicron infections soar

January 24 2022, by Geir Moulson



A woman walks past a Covid-19 test center in Frankfurt, Germany, Monday, Jan. 24, 2022, the day when German politicians discuss further measures to avoid the spread of the coronavirus. Slogan reads "Corona? test here". Credit: AP Photo/Michael Probst

Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Germany's 16 state governors decided Monday to keep existing coronavirus restrictions in place and examine how best to use increasingly strained PCR test capacities as the highly contagious omicron variant fuels a steep rise in infections.

Germany has hit a series of daily infection records over the past two weeks as omicron has spread. On Monday, the national disease control center said 840.3 new cases per 100,000 residents have been recorded over the past week. The health minister has said he expects the numbers to peak in mid-February.

On Jan. 7, [Scholz and the governors](#) agreed to toughen requirements for entering restaurants and bars and decided to shorten quarantine and self-isolation periods.

Scholz said Germany's relatively tough restrictions on private gatherings, large gatherings and other things helped delay until now the arrival of very high infection rates, "much later than in many neighboring countries; nevertheless these are very high infection figures, and so we must remain cautious and will stick to this course." The leaders did not add new restrictions for now.

German health officials have advocated prioritizing the use of PCR tests for health care employees, older people and others particularly at risk as the omicron onslaught strains capacity. Scholz said the leaders asked the federal and state health ministers to produce a "strategy balanced out to the last detail to make possible a good oversight of infections."

Although infections are rising fast, that hasn't so far been accompanied by a big increase in hospital admissions. But officials worry that Germany has a high number of unvaccinated older people in comparison with some other European countries.

Scholz acknowledged that the pace of vaccination has eased off again after picking up last month, and announced a new campaign to pep up the campaign again. As of Monday, 73.4% of the population had been fully vaccinated and 50.4% also had received a booster shot.

German lawmakers are expected to hold a first debate Wednesday on a possible universal vaccination mandate, which Scholz supports but has left to parliament to design.

Berlin is seeing a particularly steep spike in COVID-19 cases at present—on Monday, the five districts with Germany's highest infection rates were in the capital. The Mitte district, where the chancellery is located, topped the list with 2,842.9 new cases per 100,000 residents over the past week.

The city's education minister, Astrid-Sabine Busse, announced Monday that Berlin students would no longer be obliged to attend school until the end of February, but that schools would be kept open for those students who still wanted to go there.

The decision came after Berlin public health officers said they would no longer conduct contact tracing or send immediate contacts of infected children into quarantine.

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