Germany to toughen restaurant rules, cut COVID quarantine

January 7 2022, by Geir Moulson

An empty restaurant waits for customers in Cologne, Germany, Friday, Jan. 7, 2022. New corona measures are expected from a meeting of German governors and the federal government today to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. Credit: AP Photo/Martin Meissner

Germany's leaders agreed Friday to toughen requirements for entry to restaurants and bars, and decided to shorten quarantine and self-isolation

periods as the omicron variant spreads fast through the country.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz and the 16 state governors built on restrictions introduced just after Christmas that limited private gatherings to 10 people and effectively shut nightclubs.

People have already been required for some time to show proof of full vaccination or recovery to enter restaurants and bars—as well as many nonessential shops, theaters and cinemas.

Friday's decision calls for the requirements to be ratcheted up for restaurants and bars. Customers will have to show either that they have received a [booster shot](link) or provide a negative test result on top of proof that they have been vaccinated or recovered.

"Half the population will be boosted ... in a few days" and will be able to go to restaurants without a test, Berlin Mayor Franziska Giffey told reporters. "This is an extra incentive to get boosters."

Still, the eastern state of Saxony-Anhalt said it wouldn't introduce the new rule for now because its cases mostly still involve the delta variant, and Bavaria said it was skeptical.

Scholz and the governors also agreed to shorten quarantine or self-isolation periods that are currently as long as 14 days, something that many other countries already have done.

A sign at a winter market in Cologne, Germany, demands a mandatory mask and the 2G rule, that means only vaccinated or recovered customers are allowed to enter, Friday, Jan. 7, 2022. New corona measures are expected from a meeting of German governors and the federal government today to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. Credit: AP Photo/Martin Meissner

People who have received boosters will no longer have to go into quarantine after having contact with coronavirus cases, and neither will people who have been fully vaccinated or recovered in the past three months.

All others can end their quarantine or self-isolation period after 10 days if they don't have—or no longer have—symptoms; that can be cut to seven days with a negative test.

"These are strict rules, but they are pragmatic and mean an easing of the current rules," Scholz said.

Friday's decision by federal and state governments stated that the use of protective FFP2 masks in shops and on public transport is "urgently recommended."

The COVID-19 situation in Germany has been foggy for the past two weeks because of very patchy testing and slow reporting over the holiday period. Official figures, which authorities have acknowledged don't yet show the full picture, have shown a steady increase in the infection rate over the past week.

Medical staff prepare syringes with vaccination against the coronavirus and the COVID-19 disease inside Klunkerkranich Restaurant and night club during an

ongoing vaccination campaign of the Clubkommission in Berlin, Germany, Wednesday, Jan. 5, 2022. German Health Minister Karl Lauterbach renewed an appeal for vaccine holdouts to reconsider. He said people who remain unvaccinated in Germany can't expect contact restrictions for them to be lifted "in the short- or medium-term." The Clubcommission Berlin, an association that protects and supports the Berlin club culture. Credit: AP Photo/Markus Schreiber

On Friday, the national disease control center, the Robert Koch Institute, reported an official rate of 303.4 new cases per 100,000 residents over the past seven days. Over the past 24 hours, 56,335 new cases were reported.

In its weekly report on Thursday, the institute said that omicron accounted for 44.3% of cases tested for variants in Germany last week, up from 15.8% the previous week.

Germany's vaccination campaign is regaining speed after the holidays. As of Friday, 71.6% of the population had received a full first vaccine course and 41.6% had had a booster shot.

"Anyone who has an opportunity to get vaccinated shouldn't just go there, but rather run there," Scholz said.

The chancellor brushed aside criticism that he isn't providing sufficient leadership to bring about a universal vaccine mandate, an idea he first backed before taking office last month. North Rhine-Westphalia governor Hendrik Wuest, a member of Germany's main center-right opposition party, said that state governments expect a "timetable" soon.

A medical staff gives syringes with vaccination against the coronavirus and the COVID-19 disease to a doctor inside the Klunkerkranich Restaurant and night club during an ongoing vaccination campaign of the Clubkommission in Berlin, Germany, Wednesday, Jan. 5, 2022. German Health Minister Karl Lauterbach renewed an appeal for vaccine holdouts to reconsider. He said people who remain unvaccinated in Germany can't expect contact restrictions for them to be lifted "in the short- or medium-term." The Clubcommission Berlin, an association that protects and supports the Berlin club culture. Credit: AP Photo/Markus Schreiber

A closed hotel and restaurant is pictured in Cologne, Germany, Friday, Jan. 7, 2022. New corona measures are expected from a meeting of German governors and the federal government today to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. Credit: AP Photo/Martin Meissner

People with mandatory face masks line up to enter the Cathedral in Cologne, Germany, Friday, Jan. 7, 2022. New corona measures are expected from a meeting of German governors and the federal government today to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. Credit: AP Photo/Martin Meissner

Scholz deflected questions about the exact timing. saying only that "this must go quickly, and it will, and I am very much convinced of that."

"I will vote for such a vaccine mandate and also advocate it." he said.

Scholz wants to have lawmakers vote according to their personal conscience rather than along party lines. The idea is for parliament to vote on proposals drawn up by groups of lawmakers rather than by the government.

There are divisions on the issue within Scholz's three-party government. It also isn't yet clear how the mandate would be designed.