

# Germany eyes easing COVID rules; pharmacies to offer shots

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Sandra Fundel, pharmacist at the pharmacy at Bahnhof Zoo, stands outside the pharmacy with vaccination paraphernalia, next to a poster advertising the Corona vaccination in Berlin, Germany, Monday, Feb. 7, 2022. Pharmacists in the country are scheduled to begin offering vaccinations Tuesday, after parliament changed the rules so that they, dentists and vets could administer the shoots. Credit: Christophe Gateau/dpa via AP

The German government is working on plans to relax coronavirus restrictions after the peak in new cases has passed, likely by the end of February.

Unlike some of its European neighbors, Germany still has many pandemic restrictions in place that exclude unvaccinated people from restaurants, public venues and some stores.

"Perspectives for opening are being developed," government spokeswoman Christiane Hoffmann told reporters Monday in Berlin. She said the measures would be discussed at a meeting of federal and state officials on Feb. 16, but would only take effect when authorities can be sure that Germany's health system won't be overwhelmed.

"According to experts, that could be by mid-to-end February," she said.

Germany has seen a sharp spike in newly confirmed cases in recent weeks due to the omicron variant.

Pharmacists in the country are scheduled to begin offering vaccinations Tuesday, after parliament changed the rules so that they, dentists and vets could also administer the shoots.

About 74.4 % of the German population is fully vaccinated against COVID-19, while 54.3% have additionally had a booster shot. Experts say higher vaccination rates are needed to protect older and vulnerable groups.

But the governor of Bavaria says he plans not to implement a requirement for staff in nursing homes and medical facilities to be vaccinated, citing concerns about worker shortages.

Germany's health minister, Karl Lauterbach, blasted the announcement

Monday, saying a half-hearted application of the rules "won't just endanger the lives of older people with weak immune systems."

"You will also endanger the credibility of politics," he said.

The federal coalition government has backed a general vaccine mandate but proposals currently being debated by lawmakers are likely months from being approved into law.

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