

Health minister: Germany has crossed omicron peak

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Nurses care for a patient with severe COVID-19 disease in the coronavirus intensive care unit at the hospital in Fulda, Germany, Wednesday, Feb. 16, 2022. Credit: Boris Roessler/dpa via AP

Germany has crossed over the peak of new daily infections with the

omicron variant of COVID-19, the country's health minister said on Friday.

Health Minister Karl Lauterbach said government measures to curb infection numbers have been effective, but he warned against relaxing the public health rules too hastily.

"We are not really in safe waters," he told reporters in Berlin.

Lauterbach, an epidemiologist by training, noted that as many as 12% of people over age 60 in Germany are still unvaccinated. That share is three to four times higher than that of unvaccinated, vulnerable population groups in comparable countries.

Germany has been slower than many of its neighbors to relax pandemic restrictions. Chancellor Olaf Scholz and the country's 16 state governors agreed Wednesday on a [three-step plan to end most of the country's COVID-19 rules](#) by March 20.

Lauterbach defended the cautious approach, saying that "if we open too quickly, then the case numbers will rise again."

He also said a general vaccine mandate was still necessary, noting that new or existing variants of the virus could lead to a fresh wave of infections in the fall that could put a severe strain on the health system.



A nurses takes care for a patient with severe COVID-19 disease in the coronavirus intensive care unit at the hospital in Fulda, Germany, Wednesday, Feb. 16, 2022. Credit: Boris Roessler/dpa via AP

Lauterbach urged opposition lawmakers not to block compulsory vaccination proposals over party politicking. Parliament is expected to hold a free vote on the issue, but the opposition Union bloc has increasingly moved away from backing the idea in recent weeks.

Germany's disease control agency on Friday reported 220,048 newly confirmed daily cases of COVID-19 and 264 additional deaths.

The Robert Koch Institute said almost a quarter of Germany's entire population - nearly 20 million people - has not been vaccinated. The

figure includes about 4 million children under age 5 for whom COVID-19 vaccines have not yet been authorized, the institute said.

Germany announced Friday that it was taking almost 20 countries off its list of high-risk areas, including Britain, India, Spain and the United States. The move will make it easier for some travelers coming from those countries to enter Germany.

Previously, people who weren't deemed to be fully vaccinated had to quarantine for at least five days upon arrival.

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