

# German health minister still sees 'critical' COVID situation

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Germany's health minister pleaded with his compatriots Friday not to assume that the coronavirus pandemic is over as the country sees a steady rise in new cases, warning that it is still in a "critical" situation.

Germany had seen COVID-19 cases decline last month, but official figures have now shown the infection rate increasing for nine consecutive days. Officials point to the spread of an even more contagious version of the omicron [variant known as BA.2](#), which by this week accounted for half of cases in Germany, and to the relaxation of restrictions.

On Friday, the national disease control center said more than 250,000 new cases had been reported in the past 24 hours, along with 249 deaths. The infection rate stood at 1,439 new cases per 100,000 residents over seven days.

"We are in a situation that I would like to describe as critical," Health Minister Karl Lauterbach told reporters. "We have strongly rising case figures again. ... I keep reading that the omicron variant is a milder variant and that's only true to a limited extent."

"We cannot be satisfied with a situation in which 200 to 250 people are dying every day and the prospect is that in a few weeks more people will die," Lauterbach said. "The situation is objectively much worse than the mood."

He added that some people's belief that the country has put the pandemic behind it is a "misjudgement."

Germany has been easing coronavirus restrictions and is due to [lift most of them](#) on March 20. The government has drawn up new rules that would allow state governments to require measures such as mask-wearing, testing in some situations and additional measures in virus "hot spots" after that. Masks would remain mandatory on long-distance trains and flights.

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