

German lawmakers vote to abolish most pandemic restrictions

March 18 2022



File picture shows a woman wearing a dress made of hundreds of face masks as she comes back from an anti corona demonstration in Berlin, Germany, Saturday, Feb. 12, 2022. In background is the Brandenburg Gate. Credit: AP Photo/Michael Probst,file

German lawmakers voted Friday to abolish most of the country's coronavirus pandemic restrictions despite a surge in infections, with almost 300,000 new daily cases reported.

The Bundestag passed an amendment to the pandemic rules in a 364-277 vote with two abstentions. The upper house of parliament, made up of Germany's 16 states, approved the measure later Friday.

The changes mean that the requirement to wear [face masks](#) can be dropped for most public settings beginning Sunday, though all German states have said they will keep them in place for up to two weeks. Masks may still be required on [public transport](#) beyond then.

Visitors to nursing homes will also continue to need negative COVID-19 tests, but these will not be required any longer in other walks of life.

States can still impose new restrictions to curb outbreaks in virus "[hot spots](#)," but governors have complained that this measure is unworkable, given the nationwide increase in cases.

The country's disease control agency reported 297,845 newly confirmed cases in the past 24 hours, and 226 COVID-related deaths.

Health minister Karl Lauterbach defended lifting the restrictions.

"We can't continue to put the entire country under a shield in order to protect a small group of people who are unwilling to get vaccinated," he said. "The balance is being shifted."

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