

Germany tightens COVID rules for travel during fall, winter

August 24 2022, by KIRSTEN GRIESHABER



German Health Minister Karl Lauterbach wearing a face mask as he arrives for the weekly cabinet meeting of the German Government at the chancellery in Berlin, Germany, Wednesday, Aug. 24, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Markus Schreiber

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's Cabinet approved legislation

Wednesday that ensures basic protective measures against the coronavirus pandemic are continued during the fall and winter when more virus cases are expected.

The presentation of the rules—which also include the new obligation to wear N95-type face masks during all long-distance travel by train and bus as well as on planes—coincided with the publication of photos showing the chancellor and German Economy Minister Robert Habeck flying to Canada earlier this week without wearing masks.

The pictures triggered strong public criticism of an alleged double standard for politicians and regular people. Currently, medical face masks are mandatory on planes and [public transport](#) though N95-style masks are recommended.

Justice Minister Marco Buschmann and Health Minister Karl Lauterbach told reporters that the specific pandemic rules that apply to the German air force, which operates government flights, were met and that everyone on the flight, which also included German business leaders and reporters, took a PCR test before boarding the plane.

Still, the justice minister conceded that "politically, I would recommend to us as a [federal government](#) that we apply the same rules everywhere that apply elsewhere."

"Because otherwise, of course, the feeling arises that you're willing to impose something on the citizens that you don't want to impose on yourself," Buschmann added. "And that's why I can also understand to some extent that there's so much talk about it."

In addition to the mandatory use of N95-type masks during long-distance travel, the new measures, which will apply from Oct. 1 to April 7, will also include a nationwide obligation to wear masks in and test before

accessing hospitals, nursing homes and similar institutions with [vulnerable people](#).

Beyond that, Germany's 16 states will have the authority to adopt their own rules depending on how severely the virus affects their areas. State governments could decide to require masks on local public transportation, in schools for students in the fifth grade and up, and at public indoor events. If the virus spreads widely again, the number of people at public events can be limited and testing can be demanded.

The justice minister stressed that there would be no more lockdowns or school closures no matter how the pandemic develops during cold-weather seasons.

"Students were certainly the group that suffered the most in the pandemic ... especially in terms of exercising their right to education, especially in [terms](#) of school closures," Buschmann said. "And that's why I'm also glad that we were able to quickly agree that the instrument of school closures is therefore completely disproportionate."

The new regulations still need to go to Germany's lower and upper house of parliament for approval, but they are expected to pass.

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Citation: Germany tightens COVID rules for travel during fall, winter (2022, August 24)
retrieved 20 April 2024 from
<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-08-germany-tightens-covid-fall-winter.html>

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