

Germany's Merkel, state leaders ponder tougher virus rules

January 19 2021, by Kirsten Grieshaber



A member of staff at the university hospital prepares the Moderna vaccine against COVID-19 in Duesseldorf, Monday, Jan. 18, 2021. (Federico Gambarini/dpa via AP)

Chancellor Angela Merkel is holding a virtual meeting Tuesday with the

governors of Germany's 16 states to discuss the country's pandemic measures amid concerns that new mutations of the coronavirus could trigger a fresh surge in cases.

The country's [infection](#) rate has stabilized in recent days, indicating that existing restrictions may have been effective in bringing down the numbers. On Tuesday, the country's disease control center reported 11,369 new virus infections and 891 new deaths, for an overall death toll of 47,622.

The government tightened the country's lockdown in early January until the end of this month. However, surging infections in Britain and Ireland, said to be caused by a more contagious virus variant, have experts worried that the mutation could also spread quickly in Germany if measures are not extended or even toughened. Therefore, Merkel and the state governments are meeting earlier than planned to consider stricter rules.

While restaurants, most stores and schools have already been closed and those shutdowns are likely to be extended, there's also talk about possible nightly curfews, an obligation to wear the more effective FFP2 or KN95 masks on public transportation, and a push to get more people to work at home to avoid office-driven infections.



People stay in the new open Erika-Hess-Eisstadion vaccine center in Berlin, Germany, Thursday, Jan. 14, 2021. (Kay Nietfeld/Pool via AP)



Medical workers prepare syringes that contain the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine against the new coronavirus at the vaccine center at the Messe Berlin trade fair grounds on the center's opening day in Berlin, Germany, Monday, Jan. 18, 2021. The center is the third to open in Berlin. Three more are to open in coming weeks once shipments of the Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna vaccines pick up pace. (Sean Gallup/Getty Images via AP, Pool)



German Health Minister Jens Spahn shows his FFP2 face mask during a press conference in Berlin, Germany, Monday, Jan. 18, 2021 on the nationwide genome sequencing of the new coronavirus. (Kay Nietfeld/dpa via AP)



A doctor inoculates Herri Rehfeld, 92, against the new coronavirus with the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine at the vaccination center at the Messe Berlin trade fair grounds on the center's opening day in Berlin, Germany, Monday, Jan. 18, 2021. The center is the third to open in Berlin. Three more are to open in coming weeks once shipments of the Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna vaccines pick up pace. (Sean Gallup/Getty Images via AP, Pool)

Medical workers have been demanding an extension or toughening of the lockdown since many hospitals are still on edge, with intensive care wards overflowing in some areas.

"The current measures on limiting social contacts seem to be showing an effect," Susanne Johna, the head of the physicians' association Marburger Bund, told the dpa news agency, adding that the measures

should continue to be upheld to further reduce new infections.

"We urgently need further relief," Johna said.

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