

Germany's COVID infections rise again

The increase comes just as schools are scheduled to reopen. The rise has been driven by new, more-infectious variants of the coronavirus.



Many have called for teachers to be prioritized for vaccination

New coronavirus infections rose again on Sunday, prompting fears ahead of a planned easing of restrictions.

The Robert Koch Institute for infectious diseases reported 7,676 new cases on Sunday, up 1,562 from one week ago. The key seven-day incidence rate increased to 60.2 across the country, up from 57.7 a day earlier.

German authorities have repeatedly pointed to a maximum incidence rate of 50 as a target for opening up. However, schools in 10 of Germany's 16 federal states are scheduled to reopen on Monday.

Experts blamed more-infectious variants of the virus for the increase in numbers.

Additionally, the seven-day R value was put at 1.07 on Saturday afternoon, the highest in several weeks. This means that 100 infected people mathematically infect 107 more people.

RKI head Lothar Wieler called on people to persevere: “False promises don’t help anyone, and it is quite simply the case that ... we still have to hold out for a certain amount of time,” he said at a Health Ministry discussion on the subject of vaccination that was broadcast on the internet.

Health Minister Jens Spahn said Germany was in a “really difficult phase” of the pandemic. He said he knew that everyone was tired after 12 months. “A child who is 10 years old has now spent a 10th of his life in the pandemic.”

Spahn said it was socially very important that daycare centers and primary schools be able to open again.

Calls to protect teachers

Politicians have increasingly pushed to prioritize teachers for vaccines to limit the fallout of schools reopening. The national teachers association, DL, has called for further protective measures and prioritized vaccinations for teachers.

Teachers who are now returning to face-to-face teaching in primary and high school classes “should be able to receive preferential vaccination,” association president Heinz-Peter Meidinger told the *Augsburger Allgemeine* newspaper on Saturday.

“We are generally in favor of mandatory masks, which should at least be of the quality of surgical operating masks,” he said. “Fashionable textile masks or scarves are no longer appropriate to the current situation,” he added.

Susanne Lin-Klitzing, the chairwoman of the DPhV philologists association, told the newspapers of the Funke media group that if politicians wanted “full face-to-face teaching” again, they should have “offered all teachers vaccination in advance.” In addition, clear timetables would have to be developed, for example, on how long alternate teaching should run.

Nursery and primary school workers are in the third priority group, according to the current vaccination regulations, and will probably not be up until the summer.

Lower Saxony and other states are lobbying the federal government to change the vaccination ordinance so that teachers and educators can be vaccinated earlier than planned with unused doses. The state reportedly has many spare vaccines as people fail to show up for their vaccine appointments.

Meanwhile, the GEW education and science union criticized states that will reopen schools regardless of the spread of variants. They are taking “a high risk — for the health of teachers, students and their parents,” GEW chair Marlis Tepe told the Funke media group.

aw/mm (dpa, AFP)

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