

Germany, Austria and Switzerland to ease COVID restrictions



A patient in a German hospital

Berlin, February 17 (RHC)-- Germany will ease COVID-19 restrictions as a wave of infections from the Omicron coronavirus variant seems to have passed its peak, Chancellor Olaf Scholz has said. After a meeting with the heads of the federal states earlier on Wednesday, Scholz said Germany was ready to look forward with more confidence regarding COVID-19. He, however, warned that the pandemic was not over yet.

“After these long two years, we deserve that things somehow improve again and it looks a bit like that’s exactly what we have in front of us,” Scholz told reporters after the meeting. Later in a tweet, Scholz said that while the number of infections was high, it was “no longer increasing.” “We can now withdraw the restrictions step by step, but we should continue to be careful,” he said.

On Wednesday, Germany reported 219,972 new daily coronavirus cases, down 6 percent compared with the same day last week. The seven-day infection incidence per 100,000 people also dropped to 1,401 from 1,438 on Tuesday.

In a three-stage plan, the government agreed to lift restrictions on private indoor meetings for those vaccinated or recovered from the virus within days. Checks at non-essential stores for the proof of vaccination or a negative test result will end, but masks will still be required.

In the second phase starting on March 4, the maximum permitted size for outdoor events will increase to 25,000 people and nightclubs will reopen for those who have received three vaccine doses or those with two doses of vaccine plus a negative COVID test.

Unvaccinated Germans will be allowed into restaurants with a negative test beginning on March 4th, the draft showed. All major restrictions, including requirements to work from home, will expire on March 20th, but a requirement to keep distance and to wear masks indoors and on public transport will remain in place beyond March 19th.

Switzerland and Austria also announced they will scrap almost all of their COVID-19 restrictions despite the virus still circulating strongly. The Swiss government said the conditions were right for a “rapid normalisation” of life nationwide.

From Thursday, the only remaining coronavirus requirements in Switzerland will be the obligation to self-isolate for five days after a positive test and to wear masks on public transport and in healthcare institutions. However, those rules will expire at the end of March at the latest.

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