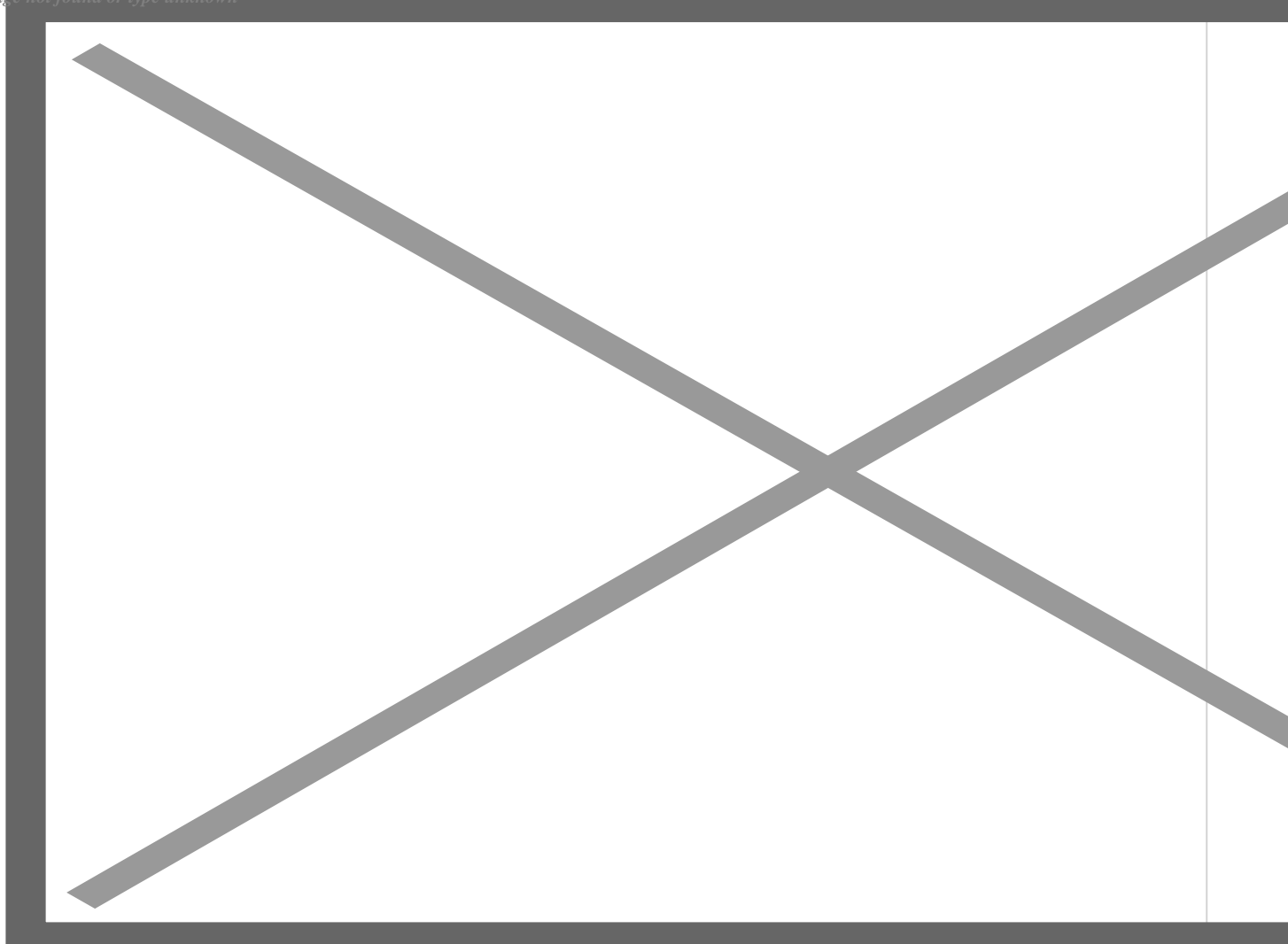


Germany cracks down, imposing curfews and stricter mask mandates

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A sign reading "Keep two meters distance" on a door to an intensive care unit in Eschweiler, Germany. (Photo: Reuters / Thilo Schmuelsing)

Berlin, October 15 (RHC)-- Germany has imposed a series of tough measures to stem the spread of the coronavirus, including curfews and harsher restrictions on private gatherings, but Chancellor Angela Merkel has warned the new policies may still fall short.

The country's 16 states agreed to the new restrictions after marathon negotiations on Wednesday, setting out uniform guidelines for hotspots across Germany and ramping up existing rules governing face masks, private events and business hours for bars and restaurants.

"What we do in the coming days and weeks will be decisive for how we get through this pandemic," Merkel said following the talks. "We are already in a phase of exponential growth, the daily numbers show that."

The intensified measures put particular focus on hotspots – now defined as areas that register 35 new infections per 100,000 people over a seven-day period – imposing mandatory mask rules anywhere people come in close contact within the risk zones. As of Wednesday, 47 cities and districts fall into that category.

Bars and restaurants in hotspots will now be required to close their doors by 11 pm, mirroring a similar curfew mandated for all businesses in Berlin last week amid a surge in cases there. Private gatherings also face new restrictions, limited to a total of 10 people from two households.

While the chancellor has repeatedly stressed that a new national shutdown should be avoided, she suggested Wednesday's measures could be insufficient to stem the rapid growth of the outbreak, which saw more than 5,000 new infections reported over the last 24 hours.

"I am not satisfied," Merkel said during Wednesday's negotiations, according to Der Spiegel, warning "The results are not hard enough for us to avert disaster." At a news conference following the talks, however, she added that "we will see if today's decisions were enough."

Bavaria's Prime Minister Markus Soder voiced similar concerns, saying: "We are actually much closer to the second lockdown than we want to admit," and "perhaps not five to midnight but rather the stroke of midnight."

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