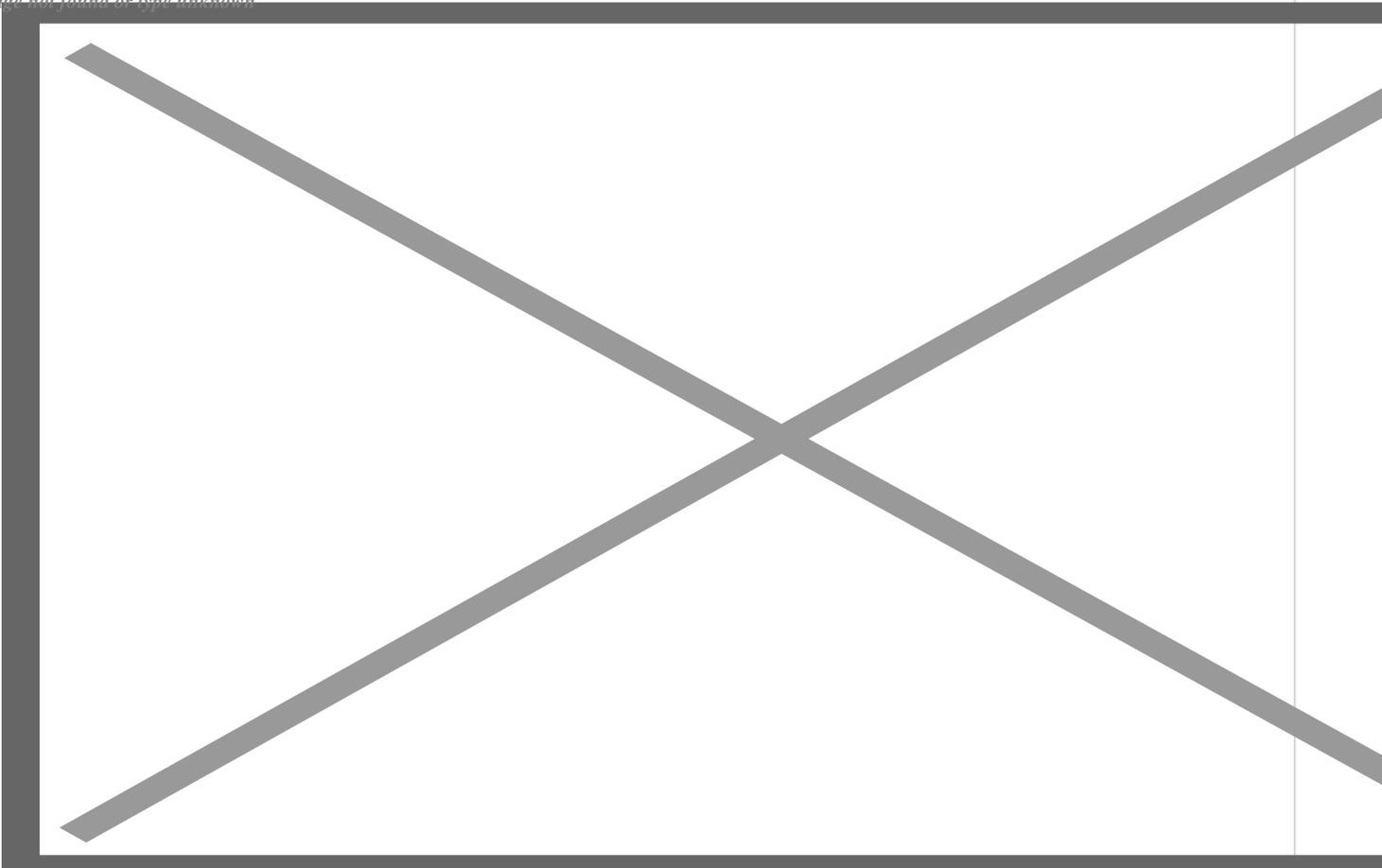


Austria may be forced lock down the vaccinated

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People wait in front of a vaccination after Austria's government has imposed a lockdown on people who are not fully vaccinated, in Vienna, Austria, November 18, 2021. © Reuters /Leonhard Foeger

Vienna, November 19 (RHC)-- Just three days after unvaccinated Austrians were told to be quarantined, a provincial governor is pressing for a nationwide lockdown of all residents as COVID-19 infections continue setting record highs.

"If no national lockdown is ordered tomorrow, there will definitely have to be a lockdown of several weeks in Upper Austria, together with our neighboring province Salzburg as of next week," Upper Austria Governor Thomas Stelzer told lawmakers on Thursday.

That will mean that at least two of Austria's nine provinces will be in full lockdown mode just days after the nation created a two-tier society by locking down the approximately two million unvaccinated Austrians.

"We must raise the vaccination rate. It is shamefully low," Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg said on Sunday, announcing that unvaccinated residents would only be allowed to leave their homes for "essential" purposes, such as buying groceries or going to a doctor's office.

Police are now doing random checks for proof of vaccination on Austrian streets. Those unvaccinated residents who are found to be in violation of the lockdown order face steep fines of up to 500 euros. Those who refuse to go through a vaccination status check will have to pay about three times as much.

Stelzer and other Austrian governors are scheduled to meet with Schallenberg and Health Minister Wolfgang Mueckstein on Friday, when a full lockdown will likely be considered.

New COVID-19 cases in the country passed the 15,000 mark for the first time on Thursday, far surpassing 2020's daily high of 9,586, set when no vaccines were available. Upper Austria and Salzburg have been hit the hardest, putting hospitals at risk of bed shortages. With some 66% of its population fully vaccinated, Austria lags behind other western European countries in terms of the COVID-19 vaccination rate.

While Austria is the first to impose a lockdown on the unvaccinated, other EU countries -- including Slovakia, Czechia and Greece -- have imposed increasingly tight restrictions on people who haven't taken a COVID vaccine.

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