

5 reasons Germany's COVID-19 infections are soaring

Germany is facing a massive fourth COVID-19 wave even though two-thirds of its population is vaccinated. Here's why.

Germany counted a staggering 50,196 new COVID-19 infections on Thursday, its highest count since the pandemic began. It is the first time the country has been battling a major wave despite a majority of its population being doubly vaccinated.

Here are the reasons why case numbers are skyrocketing.

The effect of the unvaccinated

About 67% of people in Germany are fully vaccinated against COVID-19. But experts have warned from the beginning of the rollout that the number is not high enough to keep the virus under control.

"Our vaccination rate is still under 75% of the German population," said Dr. Christine Falk, president of the German Society for Immunology. "Combined with the lack of contact restrictions, this is allowing the virus to spread almost exclusively among the unvaccinated."

According to the Robert Koch Institute, the incidence of hospitalizations for unvaccinated COVID-19 patients between 18 and 59 is currently about four times higher than for vaccinated ones. For patients over 60, it's about six times higher.

Waning immunity

While the jabs significantly lower the risk of serious illness and death, they don't fully protect against infection. With soaring case numbers, the risk of getting COVID-19 also rises for vaccinated people.

"The growing numbers are also increasing the pressure on vaccinated people, but the portion of breakthrough infections is miniscule," Dr. Frank says.

The vaccinated who could face a higher risk, she says, are the older ones with

weaker immune systems, especially if some time has passed since their second shot. The country is now administering booster shots to people who were fully immunized more than six months ago.

Fewer contact restrictions

Compared to early 2021, Germany has lax distancing measures in place during this fourth wave.

About a year ago, the government introduced rules that would eventually develop into a hard lockdown: All nonessential businesses were closed and a nighttime curfew was imposed temporarily. There were varying restrictions about how many households could meet.

In combination with the vaccine rollout, these measures caused Germany's incidence to drop in the spring.

Nowadays, people in Germany face less rigid rules: They have to wear medical, so-called FFP-2 masks on public transport and in stores, and most venues will only let them in if they are vaccinated, have recovered from COVID-19 or were tested.

The delta variant is more infectious

This year's delta, a more contagious mutation of the coronavirus, has become the predominant variant in Germany and much of the world.

It is more than twice as contagious as previous variants, according to the CDC. It might also cause unvaccinated people to experience worse symptoms.

The seasonal effect

Another factor fueling Germany's fourth wave is that winter is just around the corner.

"The delta variant virus loves the cold. We spend more time indoors which makes it easier to spread the virus," said Dr. Falk.

Germany is not the only place

Other European countries like Austria, the Netherlands and Belgium are also

seeing soaring infection incidences as these factors come together.

Dr. Frank pleads for people to be smart during this fourth wave and consistently wear masks and to take antigen tests as soon as symptoms appear. But most of all, she encourages the unvaccinated to get their shots.

“If we don’t increase the vaccination rate urgently, it will become difficult to control the situation,” she said. “The vaccines are the best thing that could’ve happened to us, but there are still too many people refusing them.”

Source:

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