

Germany Changes Corona Rules, Announces Several 'Reopening Steps'



Angela Merkel and her colleagues from the capitals in Germany's sixteen federal states adopted a new strategy in regard to the Corona rules. A complicated list of 'reopening steps' was introduced.

Berlin, March 4th, 2021 (The Berlin Spectator) — Exactly 400 days after the first Coronavirus infection was reported in Germany, the country got a new reopening strategy, in spite of the new Corona mutations and the third wave they may have triggered.

Intense Discussions

The Chancellor and the First Ministers had intense discussions, according to participants, about the Incidence Numbers, the vaccination campaign, and other issues. Parts of the content of a draft resolution that had been sent back and forth between Berlin and the states were changed during the deliberations. These are the changes the Corona conference adopted. They kick in on March 8th:

- The contact restrictions will be eased. People from up to two households may gather in groups of up to five. Children up to 14 years of age do not have to be counted. In regions with Incidence Numbers lower than 35, the number of people who may gather can be doubled to 10.
- Book shops, flower shops, and gardening centers will be allowed to reopen if they have convincing hygiene concepts. The number of customers who enter concurrently needs to be limited, depending on the space a business has. The same applies to driving and flying schools. Instructors and students need to be tested before they enter the vehicles or aircraft, on the same day. Service companies are allowed to open as well.

Additional reopening steps were announced:

- Federal states may reopen all retail businesses once their Incidence Number drops below 50. In that case, museums, galleries, and zoos may open as well. In this situation, people may engage in “contact-free” sports activities in groups of up to 10 persons. A “limited reopening” may be allowed with Incidence Numbers below 100. In this case, the states may open retail businesses, but customers may only enter them with appointments. At this moment, all federal states but Thuringia are below 100, but in only two of them, namely Rhineland-Palatinate and Schleswig-Holstein, the Incidence is below 50.
- The next “reopening step” may apply once the Incidence Number in a federal state has been below 50 for 14 consecutive days. In this case, restaurants may open their outdoor tables, and cinemas, theaters, concert halls, and operas can reopen as well. With Incidence Numbers below 100, restaurants may welcome customers with appointments who register and enter their contact data into lists. This applies two weeks after the previous “reopening step” was taken if the Incidence remains stable.
- In yet another step, states may allow outdoor events with up to 50 participants and indoor sports activities of any kind. This applies when the Incidence has been below 50 for 14 consecutive days.

The following applies as well:

- At workplaces, contacts still need to be reduced. Companies need to let their employees work from home if they can. This rule was prolonged until April 30th.
- General practitioners are supposed to be allowed to vaccinate patients in late March or early April. The doctors may decide which patients should have priority.
- Quick Corona tests will be available to everyone soon. The government will pay for one test per person and week.
- An “emergency brake” is part of the rules. If and when the Incidence Number exceeds 100 again, today’s rules are supposed to kick in again.

The lockdown Germany has been in for months remains in place until March 28th, 2021.

All relevant Corona numbers for Germany, and daily Corona updates, can be found in our Corona chronology.

Old Strategy Dumped

The government is asking everyone to refrain from taking trips, domestic or international ones unless they are absolutely necessary. Travelers who return to Germany need to go into 10-day quarantines. After five days, they can get out of their quarantine with a negative Corona test. But the latter does not apply to persons who have been to “virus variant areas” such as Great Britain. They have to stay in quarantine for 14 days and will not get a ‘get out of quarantine for free’ card, so to speak.

With their complicated reopening plan, the federal government and federal states dumped their old strategy. So far, Incidence Numbers below 35, or at least below 50, had been the level at which businesses were supposed to be permitted to open. Now, certain reopening steps may be taken at levels between 50 and 100. Here, the will of less careful First Ministers seems to have prevailed.

Free Corona Tests

After nine hours of Corona discussions, Chancellor Merkel stated, the easing of restrictions was supposed to be “secured” by the use of quick Corona tests. All citizens would have the opportunity to get tested for free, once a week. Test centers would be set up. She said self-tests could be used at schools and kindergartens. The Chancellor also announced more reopening steps would be discussed on March 22nd, at the next Corona conference.

Mrs. Merkel, who intends to end her political career in September, said Germany was about to enter a new phase in the Corona pandemic. The latter should not be entered with carelessness, but with justified hope. According to the Chancellor, the country made a lot of headway. She also said the coming spring would be different from the last one.

Some federal states intend to put in place their own rules.

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