

World's first nationwide lockdown for the unvaxxed approved in Austria

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A line in front of a Christmas market in Vienna, Austria, November 12, 2021. © Georg

Vienna, November 15 (RHC)-- Austria has imposed new curbs on the unvaccinated starting from Monday. The measure aims to ease pressure on hospitals and ICUs. The lockdown came into effect at midnight and applies to people aged 12 and older who have not been vaccinated and have not recently recovered from COVID-19.

“This step was not easy to take, but it is necessary,” Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg said. “The risk for the unvaccinated people is much higher. Therefore, we are forced to take this difficult step to reduce the number of contacts.” Schallenberg said the fourth wave of infections had hit the country with “full force.”

The chancellor once again urged people to get vaccinated in order to “break” the wave. “Otherwise we’ll never escape this vicious cycle.” Two of the hardest-hit regions, Upper Austria and Salzburg, were the first to announce they would impose a lockdown on Monday.

Interior Minister Karl Nehammer earlier said lockdown violators would face hefty fines. Customers may be punished with a fine of up to ?500 (\$573) for flouting restrictions while businesses may be slapped with a penalty of up to ?30,000 (\$34,354).

“For those who keep to all the measures, it’s more than unfair if there are people who think they can simply circumvent or even fool health authorities, the health ministry and experts’ guidelines,” the minister explained.

The idea of a lockdown exclusively targeting the unvaccinated was first floated by the government in September as a response to a nightmare scenario in which 30% of ICU beds would be occupied by COVID-19 patients. That figure currently stands at 20% and is rising. Health officials have grown increasingly alarmed that hospitals will become overcrowded amid what they call “the pandemic of the unvaccinated.”

President Alexander Van der Bellen warned on Saturday that the situation in some hospitals and ICUs was “unbearable,” and could deteriorate further unless strong action is taken. Roughly 65% of Austria’s nine-million population have been fully vaccinated, one of the lowest rates in Europe, according to Reuters. The Austrian government warned that around 83% of symptomatic cases recorded between January and September of this year involved unvaccinated people.

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