



Translation

Press release

Number 144/20, 30 April 2020

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Telephone conference between Federal Chancellor Merkel and the Heads of Government of the Länder on 30 April 2020

Measures to mitigate the COVID-19 epidemic

The Federal Chancellor and the Heads of Government of the Länder have adopted the following decision:

Now that Germany has succeeded in reducing the number of new infections from the SARS-CoV-2 virus, for which it has earned international respect, since 20 April the Länder have gradually been starting to ease containment measures on the basis of the joint decision with the Federal Chancellor.

It is still too early to be able to judge from the number of new infections registered whether these steps to ease the measures have caused the rate of infection to increase despite hygiene regulations. This assessment and the related decision on whether greater steps can be implemented to lift the measures is to be taken on 6 May in a further meeting between the Federal Chancellor and the Heads of Government of the Länder.

In the meantime, the Federation and the Länder are continuing to work intensively to control the rate of infection as effectively as possible through a broad-based package of measures and to strengthen the healthcare system. Only with successful infection control and consistently low rates of new infections will it be possible to retain the less stringent measures in the long term and avoid the need for a return to nationwide restrictions.

At the same time, economic and social assistance is being introduced to mitigate the negative impact of the crisis.

The Federation and the Länder are carefully weighing up the impact of all decisions from a healthcare, social and economic perspective. The constantly growing scientific findings on this novel virus and many interdisciplinary expert opinions are also being channelled into the decision-making process. The responsibility for the decisions lies with the Federation and the Länder, which, in view of the fact



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that they are dealing with an unprecedented situation with many barely foreseeable risks, have adopted a prudent approach as the guiding principle for justifiable action, involving gradual steps and particularly strict criteria where temporary curtailments of fundamental rights are necessary.

Against this backdrop, the Federal Chancellor and the Heads of Government of the Länder have agreed to the following:

1. The **joint decisions** and the accompanying decisions of the Head of the Federal Chancellery and the Heads of the State Chancelleries, as well as the decisions of the Corona Cabinet, shall continue to apply unless other stipulations are made below.

2. A key factor in infection control is comprehensive **contact-tracing** in the case of all newly infected persons. If contact-tracing were not to succeed, the threat of the infection gaining new momentum would be considerable. For this reason, the Länder are increasing their personnel capacity significantly to adapt to the situation (a team of 5 people per 20,000 inhabitants). Since 24 April, all health authorities have to inform the Robert Koch Institute via the competent Land authorities whether comprehensive contact-tracing is guaranteed, at risk or currently no longer possible. This enables the Länder to immediately increase capacities in the case of particularly badly affected health services and to ask the Federation for assistance from its contact-tracing teams from the RKI, the Bundeswehr and the medical student programme Medis4ÖGD. Contact-tracing that is as comprehensive as possible is the fundamental prerequisite for further steps to ease the containment measures and an important criterion for being able to assess what average numbers of new infections over several days can be tolerated.

3. The epidemiological development in Germany to date has shown that repeatedly, local occurrences can result in particularly severe regional impacts with regard to the spread of the SARS-CoV2 virus. The Federation and the Länder are therefore continuing to prepare rapidly available support measures for particularly affected regions and to liaise closely on this matter with the federal and Land crisis task forces. If the achievements in lowering the infection rate across Germany are not to be jeopardised, there must be an immediate response to regional developments featuring high numbers of new infections and a rapid increase in the spread of the infection. That includes the immediate and consistent local re-introduction of the **comprehensive restrictions** that were in force prior to 20 April.



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Furthermore, restrictions on non-essential travel to and outside the particularly affected regions may be required in specific cases.

If the infection gains new transregional momentum, giving rise to the fear that the healthcare system could be overwhelmed, some or all of the restrictions must be reintroduced in all Länder.

4. On 13 March 2020, the Federal Chancellor and the Heads of Government of the Länder called upon the clinics in Germany to postpone all plannable non-essential admissions and operations from 16 March 2020 in order to have sufficient time to prepare for the unforeseeable number of COVID-19 patients and to reserve and expand the **capacity of intensive care units**. Currently, around 40 percent of intensive care beds are being kept free – with financial compensation. Due to the current development of the COVID-19 infection rates and the precise overview made possible by the intensive care register of the German Interdisciplinary Association for Intensive Care and Emergency Medicine (DIVI-Intensivregister), a somewhat larger proportion of hospital capacity can now be used for plannable operations again. This is also necessary because the exclusive long-term prioritisation of one particular group of patients to the exclusion of other groups of sick persons is not justifiable. At the same time, sufficient COVID-19 treatment capacities should be reserved and adapted according to how the pandemic develops. The Federation has published a criteria-based implementation concept; on the basis of which as of now the Länder can assume responsibility for regional coordination, taking into account regional characteristics. The DIVI-IntensivRegister for monitoring intensive care capacity in Germany is currently being developed into a tool that can use known parameters to predict national and regional demand for intensive care beds for COVID-19 patients two weeks in advance. This tool will receive further support from the Federal Ministry of Health and will be constantly improved and expanded while in operation.



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5. Major events such as public celebrations, major sporting events with spectators, larger concerts, festivals, village and town fêtes, street parties, wine and shooting festivals and funfairs are currently prohibited. Due to the ongoing unpredictability of the rate of infection, it is assumed that this ban will remain in place until 31 August at least.

It is not yet clear when and under what conditions smaller public or private events and celebrations as well as events of a non-celebratory nature may be permitted to take place in future due to the particularly high risk of infection in this area. It depends on the subsequent development of the epidemic.

6. The Federal Chancellor and the Heads of Government of the Länder reaffirm their thanks to the **churches and religious communities**, which played an important role in helping to stop the spread of the coronavirus by exercising the necessary restraint and refraining from holding public services and prayer meetings despite major festivals in the past weeks.

The success achieved as a result of these measures now means that they can gradually be eased. Also because of the specific protection of freedom of religion set down in the Basic Law, the review of the restrictive measures requires that assemblies to practise religion be permitted again as long as they comply with the specific requirements of infection control.

Against the backdrop of the partner-based nature of the relationship between the state and religious communities in Germany, the Länder and the Federal Minister of the Interior, in consultation with the churches and major religious communities, have discussed their comprehensive concepts for conducting services and religious activities, taking account of infection control requirements, and based on this have compiled an overview of the measures planned by the churches and religious communities.

From now on, assemblies to practise religion (services and prayer meetings) will be allowed to take place again. The provisions apply correspondingly to philosophical and non-confessional organisations. The Länder will coordinate the details.



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7. **Playgrounds** can be reopened under certain conditions to offer families additional public areas for recreation apart from green spaces and parks.

8. The following **cultural institutions** can reopen, subject to conditions for hygiene, organising admission and preventing queues from forming:

- a. museums, exhibitions and galleries
- b. memorials and
- c. zoological and botanical gardens.

Particularly in the case of smaller and historic buildings, this is dependent on the availability of sufficient space and personnel for these measures to be implemented. The Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media is requested to set up at short notice a funding programme to the initial tune of 10 million euros for coronavirus-related restructuring measures in small and medium-sized museums.

9. The Head of the Federal Chancellery and the Heads of the State and Senate Chancelleries are charged with the task of drafting decision proposals for 6 May for the further gradual opening of **schools**, the further opening of **childcare facilities** and the gradual resumption of **sports activities** on the basis of the recommendations of the competent specialised ministers' conferences.

10. The competent specialised ministers' conferences are being instructed to draw up proposals for framework conditions for the gradual opening of **catering and tourist facilities** and for **other cultural institutions** before the conference between the Federal Chancellor and the Heads of Government of the Länder, due to take place after 6 May.