

**Video conference between the Federal Chancellor and the
Heads of Government of the Länder
on 5 January 2021**

DECISION

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

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected the Christmas festivities and New Year 2021 celebrations. Many citizens went without meeting others, gatherings which would have been especially important to them at this time of the year, in order to protect themselves and others. For this we thank everyone very much.

Nonetheless, the burden on the healthcare sector remains great and has increased further. We would like to extend our gratitude and our special recognition for the tireless efforts of the medical and nursing staff, doctors and all others who are working in hospitals, nursing homes and health authorities.

With the mobilisation of all forces in science and research, vaccines with good tolerability and high efficacy have been developed, tested and deployed in record time. All those involved deserve thanks and recognition. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the Federal and Land Governments have supported the rapid development of vaccines as a means to tackle it. With the vaccines that are now available, there is a prospect of a normalisation of our everyday life and the return to a life without pandemic-related restrictions.

The Federal and Land Governments expressly welcome the joint ordering of vaccines by the European Union, and support the goal of jointly securing vaccines for all 27 countries of the EU. In a time

of global pandemic, national solo efforts prevent effective health protection.

However, the months ahead, January, February and March, will require considerable patience and discipline on the part of each and every one of us. Due to the seasonal conditions, the winter months favour the spread of the virus, and the vaccinations will only have a dampening effect on the infection dynamics once a large section of the younger population has also been vaccinated.

The Federal and Land Governments are concerned about the development of mutations of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The common goal of the Federal and Land Governments is to restrict as much as possible the entry and the spread of virus mutations with possibly less favourable characteristics.

An accurate assessment of the development of the infection rate is extremely difficult at the beginning of the new year. There may have been delays in testing and reporting because of the many public holidays. In addition, the impact of the special social gathering and travel behaviour during the festive season will only be reflected in the infection rates later. We can assume that the current statistics tend to under-report the real infection rates. Nevertheless, it can certainly be said that the nationwide infection rate in Germany is still far too high.

In just over three-quarters of the 410 regional districts and city districts, the 7-day incidence is over 100 (292 regional districts and city districts). This means that there were more than 100 new cases per 100,000 inhabitants there in the last seven days. More than 70 regional districts and city districts have an incidence of over 200. Therefore, after taking all the health, economic and social factors into consideration, it is necessary to maintain the far-reaching restrictions beyond 10 January. In accordance with the hotspot strategy, further restrictive measures will be implemented in all regions that have a particularly high infection rate.

The aim of the Federal and Land Governments remains to reduce the 7-day incidence to less than 50 new infections per 100,000 inhabitants, in order to enable the health authorities –

supported by the Federal and Land Governments – to once again trace infection chains and order quarantine for category 1 contact persons. In order to assess all aspects of the pandemic, additional indicators will also be followed closely, such as the burden on the healthcare system, or the vaccination progress, and in particular those indicators which provide additional information about the infection dynamics, such as the reproduction number (R) or the doubling time.

Against this background, the Federal Chancellor and the Heads of Government of the Länder have agreed that:

1. The existing decisions of the Federal Chancellor and the Heads of Government of the Länder remain valid and in place. **All temporary measures in place until 10 January 2021** which are based on joint decisions will be **extended by the Länder until 31 January 2021**, through corresponding Land regulations. The Federal Chancellor and the Heads of Government of the Länder urgently request all citizens to continue to reduce all contacts to the absolute necessary minimum during the next three weeks, and to stay at home as far as possible.
2. **In an extension of the previous decisions, private gatherings** will only be allowed with members of one's own household and a maximum of one other person from another household.
3. **Company canteens** will be closed wherever the work processes allow this. The supply of takeaway food and beverages remains permitted. Food and drink may not be consumed on the premises.
4. Employers are urgently requested to provide **generous opportunities for employees to work from home**, to enable nationwide implementation of the principle "We're staying at home".
5. In regional districts with a 7-day incidence of over 200 new infections per 100,000 inhabitants, the Länder will **take further local measures** in accordance with the Infection Protection Act (*Infektionsschutzgesetz*), in particular restricting people's

movement to a radius of 15km around their place of residence, where there is no valid reason for exceeding this. Day trips and tourist excursions are explicitly not a valid reason.

6. Special protective measures must be taken in **care homes and nursing homes**. High incidences among the elderly population and numerous outbreaks in such establishments in recent weeks, despite all the measures already taken –such as the implementation of hygiene concepts and the provision of personal protective equipment – have highlighted this fact yet again. Rapid tests for people accessing these establishments will remain of particular importance at least until vaccination with both doses has been completed in the establishments and the people have developed immunity. Therefore, based on the joint decision of 13 December 2020, the Länder have ordered mandatory testing numerous times per week for staff in care homes and nursing homes as well as for visitors in regions with high infection rates. In many cases, the homes lack the personnel capacities to carry out rapid tests on site, even though payment for both acquiring and performing the tests is secured through the federal testing regulations. The establishments are responsible for ensuring comprehensive implementation of the testing ordered. To support this, the Federal and Land Governments will start a joint initiative, building on existing measures by the Länder, to provide volunteers to temporarily carry out extensive rapid testing in these establishments.

The aid organisations in Germany have already agreed to provide the appropriate training courses. The municipal umbrella associations will coordinate to determine the regional needs, and the Federal Employment Agency will assist with placing volunteers. This initiative should also support integration assistance institutions.

7. The Robert Koch Institute is carefully examining reports of **new mutations** of the virus with modified characteristics, for example regarding an increased risk of infection or severity of progression in different age groups. The common goal of the Federal and Land Governments is to limit as far as possible the entry from abroad of any mutations with characteristics that

might worsen the pandemic, to discover such mutations in Germany through increased sequencing, and to restrict their spread as much as possible through prioritised contact tracing and quarantines. The Federal Ministry of Health will issue a regulation on increased sequencing in terms of the Third Act to Protect the Population (*Bevölkerungsschutzgesetz*). In cases of unavoidable entry from areas where such virus mutations exist, the Federal Police (*Bundespolizei*) will monitor adherence to the specific entry requirements more strictly. The Länder will ensure that monitoring of quarantine in such cases is also carried out more intensively as a top priority, along with the contact tracing of cases when such virus mutations are discovered in Germany.

8. In the previous decisions of the Federal Chancellor and the Heads of Government of the Länder, it was assumed that **vaccination would start** in 2021. In fact, thanks to the early approval of the BioNTech-Pfizer vaccine and provision of infrastructure by the Länder, it was already possible to start vaccination in all Länder on 27 December 2020. 1.3 million doses of the vaccine were delivered to the Länder by the end of the year, and almost 2.7 million more doses will follow by 1 February 2021, so that by this date approximately four million vaccine doses will have been delivered. Based on notifications from the manufacturer, the Federal Government will give the Länder reliable delivery times to enable verified appointment management on site.

By mid-February at the latest, it will be possible to offer all residents of care homes and nursing homes the opportunity to be vaccinated. Not least due to the high numbers of cases and the severe disease progression in these homes, this is an important first intermediate goal of the vaccination campaign.

The aim is to increase the initially limited production capacities in Germany. For this purpose, the Federal Government and Land Hesse are assisting BioNTech wherever possible, so that production can already be approved and started before the end of February in a new facility in Marburg. In addition, the Federal Government will also discuss with the manufacturers how to

build up further production capacities for vaccines as soon as possible.

In the first quarter of 2021, the approval of further vaccines can be expected, resulting in the delivery of additional vaccine doses.

9. The operation of **childcare facilities and schools** is of primary importance for the education of children and for the compatibility of work and family life for parents. Closed schools and childcare facilities, suspended attendance requirements or distance learning in schools for an extended period are not without negative consequences for the educational biographies and social participation of children and young people. Nevertheless, the measures taken in this area, too, by the Länder in their decision of 13 December 2020 must also be extended until the end of January.
10. In light of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, the existing benefits may not be sufficient in some cases. Accordingly, the Federal Government will pass legislation to grant child sick-leave benefits for a further 10 days per parent in 2021 (20 additional days for single parents). The benefits will also apply in cases where **childcare at home** becomes necessary, because the school or nursery and/or the class or group is closed due to the pandemic, or the attendance requirements for lessons are suspended and/or access to childcare services is reduced.
11. In all areas, the restrictions have been accompanied by comprehensive **financial assistance programmes** of the Federal Government and Länder. Through instalment payments, over a billion euro of November aid has been provided by the Federal Government to those affected. The full payment of the November aid requested will be made via the Länder no later than 10 January 2021. Applications for the December aid have been possible since the middle of December 2020, and the first payments already started at the beginning of January. Now, the interim financial help III package of the Federal Government becomes particularly important. Depending on the decrease in turnover and the extent of the impact on the business, this package offers

reimbursement of a certain percentage of fixed costs, up to a maximum of 500,000 euro per month. Instalment payments will be made possible. The first regular payments for the interim financial help III package, which runs until the end of June 2021, will be made by the Länder in the first quarter of 2021. Once the Federal Government has put in place the necessary conditions, the Federal and Land Governments will make the payments as quickly as possible.

12. In future, for **entry into Germany from high-risk areas**, alongside the existing ten-day mandatory quarantine, which can be terminated prematurely as soon as a negative result is obtained from a COVID-19 test carried out no earlier than the fifth day of the quarantine, mandatory testing on entry will also be introduced (two-test strategy). The mandatory testing on entry requirements can be satisfied by testing within 48 hours prior to entry, or by testing immediately after entry. The model quarantine regulations will be adjusted accordingly, and implemented by the Länder in their corresponding quarantine regulations by 11 January 2021¹. On the basis of the Third Act to Protect the Population (*Bevölkerungsschutzgesetz*), the Federal Government will issue special regulations, beyond the mandatory testing already in place since August 2020, in particular for mandatory testing prior to entry from specific high-risk areas from which there is a special risk of infection due to the spread of mutations of the virus or particularly high infection rates. The Federal and Land Governments once again expressly point out that travel to high-risk areas without valid reason should be avoided unconditionally, and that in addition to the mandatory testing and quarantine period, online entry registration is obligatory for travellers entering Germany from high-risk areas.
13. The Federal Chancellor and the Heads of Government of the Länder will consult again on **25 January 2021** to review the

¹ Attention is drawn to the decision of the Higher Administrative Court for Land North Rhine-Westphalia (case 13 B 1770/20 NE), which overturned the mandatory quarantine with voluntary testing after 5 days for people returning from areas designated as high-risk by the Robert Koch Institute for North Rhine-Westphalia.

ongoing development of the infection and decide on measures to be implemented from 1 February 2021 onwards.