

## **Video conference between the Federal Chancellor and the Heads of Government of the Länder on 10 February 2021**

### **DECISION**

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

In recent weeks, the far-reaching measures to reduce contacts have led to a **significant decrease in the infection rate**. For the first time since the end of October 2020, we have managed to reduce the number of new infections per 100,000 inhabitants over a 7-day period to below 80 nationwide. For some Länder, an incidence of less than 50 is already within sight, although it has not yet been reached. This has been made possible by the fact that citizens have reduced their contacts even further and have supported the restrictions on everyday life in a disciplined and prudent manner over this long period. The Federal Chancellor and the Heads of Government of the Länder are very grateful for this.

At the same time, **variants of the coronavirus** with different properties are spreading. In particular, mutations that are more contagious than the wild-type virus are spreading especially quickly and require significant additional efforts to reduce the number of infections. The **contact restrictions** must therefore **categorically remain in place during the coming weeks**. Citizens are urged to continue to restrict contacts to an absolute minimum, even in areas where the infection rate is steadily decreasing. The **principle of “we’re staying at home”** remains the primary tool in the fight against the pandemic and saves human lives every day. Wearing medical masks indoors significantly reduces the rate of infection – it is therefore strongly recommended, if not already legally required, in all situations where two or more people gather indoors.

Against the backdrop of the virus mutations, steps to ease restrictions must be implemented carefully and gradually, so that we do not jeopardise the successful containment of the infection rate through a renewed exponential increase in the number of cases. No one would benefit if extensive restrictions on public life had to be reintroduced because the infection rate accelerated again as a result of restrictions being eased too much or too quickly. In the next few weeks, the Federal Government

and the Länder will continue to cooperate on agreeing steps to ease restrictions. They will primarily be guided by the national and regional infection rates.

The fact that around one year after the start of the pandemic various kinds of vaccines are available, with more in the pipeline, is a great achievement by **the scientific community** and the research-based vaccine manufacturers, also and especially from Germany. All those involved deserve special thanks and respect.

**Rapid vaccination** of the population is the prerequisite for effective long-term control of the virus. As soon as enough vaccines are available and all citizens can be offered the opportunity to be vaccinated, there is a prospect of **normalisation of our everyday life** and the return to a life without pandemic-related restrictions. The Federal Government and the Länder will therefore continue to make every effort to vaccinate as many citizens as possible, as soon as possible.

Against this backdrop, 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 shall continue to apply, provided this decision does not make any deviating specifications. The Länder will amend their own regulations accordingly and **extend them until 7 March 2021**.
2. Reducing the number of contacts and complying with the coronavirus rules in order to restrict the spread of the virus remains of paramount importance:
  - a. The Federal Chancellor and the Heads of Government of the Länder urgently request all citizens to continue to limit all contacts to the absolute minimum over the coming weeks, and to avoid meeting indoors in particular. **Private gatherings** will continue to only be allowed with members of one's own household and a maximum of one other person from another household. Keeping the number of households from which the other people come as low and as constant as possible ("social bubble") greatly reduces the risk of infection.
  - b. **Medical masks** (so-called surgical masks, or FFP2 or similar masks) offer greater protection than normal fabric masks. There is therefore an obligation to wear medical masks when using public transport and in shops. In general, the use of medical masks is recommended indoors.
  - c. **Hygiene concepts** must be implemented consistently in all institutions, and adapted where necessary in light of new findings – for example with regard to virus mutations.

- d. Unnecessary **private trips and visits** – even to relatives – must still be avoided. This also applies domestically and to regional day trips for tourism purposes.
3. In view of the pandemic situation, a further reduction of epidemiologically relevant contacts in the workplace is necessary. Employers must enable employees to **work from home**, provided that their work tasks permit this. This reduces contacts in the workplace and on the way to and from work. The Federal Chancellor and the Heads of Government of the Länder call upon employers to apply the SARS-CoV-2 Occupational Health and Safety Regulation (Arbeitsschutzverordnung) consistently, to significantly reduce the staff on site in the workplace by offering generous opportunities to work from home, or to keep their offices closed completely, and ask all employees to make use of the offer. Where working from home is not possible, medical masks should be worn whenever more than one person is in one room.
4. Children, young people and their parents are particularly affected by the restrictions. **Reopening childcare facilities and schools is therefore a top priority** in order to safeguard the education and future of our children and young people. This area is therefore to be the first in which restrictions are to be gradually eased. Masks, ventilation and hygiene measures will still be necessary. Medical masks should be used wherever possible. Rapid tests should also increasingly enable safe teaching in schools and safe childcare and education in childcare facilities and daycare centres, and minimise the risk of infection. In view of the high societal importance of education and childcare for children, young people and their parents, and in view of the difficulty in implementing distancing rules in the daily work of daycare centres and primary schools, the Federal Government and the Länder request the Federal Minister of Health to examine, in consultation with the Conference of the Ministers of Health of the Länder (GMK), whether the next update of the coronavirus vaccination regulations could place employees in childcare facilities and primary school teachers in category 2 with higher priority so that they can be vaccinated earlier than previously planned. Within the framework of their right to self-determination in the field of education, the Länder will decide on the gradual return to classroom attendance and extending the operations of childcare facilities. At the same time, they will increase their efforts to promote the use of digital technology for learning to flank split teaching and the step by step return to classroom attendance. The Federal Government is supporting this with the Digital Pact for Schools, including the emergency assistance programmes to provide digital devices for pupils and teachers.

5. Hairdressers can resume operations from 1 March 2021, subject to hygiene rules, controlled access by appointments and the use of medical masks. In view of the importance of hairdressers for personal hygiene and the fact that they have been closed for a long time now, it seems necessary to allow their services to be used, as significant parts of the population, especially the elderly, are dependent on them.
6. From today's perspective, especially against the backdrop of the uncertainty surrounding the spread of the virus mutations, the Länder can take the next step to ease restrictions when there is a stable 7-day incidence of a maximum of 35 new infections per 100,000 inhabitants. This next step will include reopening retail trade, with a limit of one customer per 20 square metres, reopening museums and art galleries and reopening the remaining personal care service providers. Joint arrangements should be made with neighbouring regions that have higher incidence rates in order to avoid use of the reopened services by inhabitants of neighbouring Länder as far as possible. In order to give citizens and businesses a planning perspective, the Federal Government and the Länder are continuing to work on the next steps of **a safe and fair strategy to ease restrictions** with regard to social distancing, culture, sport in groups, leisure activities, cafés and restaurants and hotels, so that our lives can progressively return to normal again. This strategy will be prepared by the working group at the level of the Head of the Federal Chancellery and the heads of the state and senate chancelleries.
7. In Länder or districts which still cannot bring their incidence below 50 due to their high 7-day incidence, the Länder or districts will maintain or expand **further extensive local or regional measures** in accordance with the Protection against Infection Act (Infektionsschutzgesetz) in order to rapidly reduce the number of infections.
8. The Federal Government will continue to assume organisational and financial responsibility for the joint procurement of **vaccines**, and the Länder will provide the necessary structures for carrying out vaccinations locally.

At the joint vaccination summit on 1 February 2021, the Federal Government and the Länder therefore agreed on an update of the national vaccination strategy, which the Federal Minister of Health will implement in cooperation with the health ministers of the Länder. This will incorporate a national vaccination plan, which will provide a model for the future course of the vaccination campaign for the coming weeks and months on the basis of the information available, thereby improving planning reliability with regard to the full utilisation of vaccination capacities.

The Federal Government will remain in ongoing dialogue with the manufacturers and continue to work to achieve more reliable planning of delivery dates in the longer term, and will continue to communicate any delays in vaccine deliveries to the Länder immediately, to further ensure that appointment management is as effective as possible in the vaccination centres. This is particularly important in order to ensure that the second doses are administered on time.

9. The Federal Government and the Länder are adhering to their goal of offering all citizens the **opportunity to be vaccinated** by the end of the summer at the latest. This goal is achievable on the basis of the current approval data and delivery volumes promised by the manufacturers. The Federal Government and the Länder will make all appropriate organisational arrangements. This should ensure a sufficient level of protection before autumn.
10. It is to be expected that residents and nursing staff in the first **care homes and nursing homes** will soon have received a second vaccination. At the same time, the Federal Government, the Länder and local authorities as well as social organisations have made a joint effort to boost the implementation of rapid tests in care homes, nursing homes and institutions working in the area of integration. Against this backdrop, the Federal Chancellor and the Heads of Government of the Länder request the GMK (Conference of the Ministers of Health of the Länder) to present timely recommendations regarding which time interval is required after the second vaccination and what testing concept is necessary to safely relax the rules for visiting these institutions once again. Where necessary, the Bundeswehr will continue to provide support with testing in the institutions until Easter, beyond the initially offered three-week period, wherever no civilians can be found via the Federal Employment Agency at short notice to continue the activities.
11. In the last three months, in addition to the further expansion of the PCR laboratory capacities to handle currently up to two million tests per week, it has also been possible to make millions of PoC antigen rapid tests available for use by trained personnel; estimates range from 15 to 35 million rapid tests carried out in Germany in January 2021. Since the end of October, when such PoC antigen rapid tests were first made available, the federal testing regulations have been amended several times so that the costs for preventive testing in the healthcare system are fully covered by the Federal Government.

The Federal Chancellor and the Heads of Government of the Länder see **rapid tests for self-testing** as another suitable means of increasing testing capacities in Germany. The Federal Minister of Health has established the legal basis for the distribution of such tests in Germany by means of a regulation. As soon as

manufacturers apply for approval of these self-tests, which are intended for use without prior training, the Federal Government will quickly review these applications and approve them if the review is successful. An important criterion here is proof of sufficient quality, because too many false-negative test results provided by the self-tests can have fatal consequences.

12. The Federal Government and the Länder have agreed on extensive support measures to assist the companies that have had to close due to the lockdown. Since the end of November, more than five billion euro have been paid out to the companies affected (November and December aid). From today, applications can be submitted for the interim financial help III package, and thus payouts of generous instalment payments will begin in the next few days (up to 100,000 euro per month, up to 400,000 euro for four months in an automated process). In talks with the EU, the Federal Government has also succeeded in more than doubling the EU framework aid permitted for losses caused by the coronavirus. People engaged in the cultural sector are particularly affected by the pandemic, which is why the Federal Government has allocated a further one billion euro to the “Restart Culture” (Neustart Kultur) rescue package and programme for the future, which are also to be paid out quickly.
13. The Federal Government has further developed **digital tools** to provide additional support to the **health authorities** with their diverse tasks. In particular, the widespread use of SORMAS (Surveillance Outbreak Response Management and Analysis System) is required for better management of contact persons and contact chains. The Länder will introduce corresponding regulations to ensure that all health authorities use SORMAS and DEMIS in future. The Federal Government will provide the necessary technical resources. SORMAS is to be installed in all health authorities by the end of February. The Federal Government will provide the SORMASX and SORMAS-eXtra Layer interfaces quickly.
14. Citizens are asked to fully trust and cooperate with the health authorities in the event of an infection. The health authorities can only break the chains of transmission if they are given the names of all **contact persons**, so that quarantine and testing can be carried out immediately. This is an essential basis for stabilising the number of new infections and thus also for the prospects for easing measures.
15. The ongoing pandemic situation will continue to place a huge strain on **hospitals** and will partially prevent their refinancing through planned operations and treatments. As specified in the decision by the Federal Chancellor and the Heads of Government of the Länder from 25 November 2020, the Federal Ministry of

Health has undertaken an assessment of the economic security of hospitals which keep intensive care capacities available for treating COVID-19 patients, and has already twice introduced appropriate regulations to expand the compensation payments for hospitals. More than two billion euro have already been paid to the Länder out of the federal budget, to be transferred to the beneficiary hospitals. The Federal Ministry of Health will continue to regularly monitor developments in future, together with the advisory council formed in accordance with Section 24 of the Act of the Financing of Hospitals (KHG) and the health ministers of the Länder, and make further adjustments where necessary. The Federal Government and the Länder will continue to work on this topic and will return to it at their next meeting.

16. The Federal Chancellor and the Heads of Government of the Länder will consult again on 3 March 2021 in light of further infection developments.

Statements for the record:

TH: Thuringia emphasises the importance of a pandemic management strategy to be developed by the Federal Government and the Länder, and expects this strategy to contain clear and transparent guidelines for all areas of society. In the case of both an improvement and a deterioration in the infection rate.

The work on this strategy, which was already agreed at the meeting of the Federal Chancellor and the Heads of Government of the Länder on 19 January 2021, must now be carried out immediately – including the proposals submitted by Schleswig-Holstein, Lower Saxony and Thuringia – and must be concluded in time for the next meeting between the Federal Chancellor and the Heads of Government of the Länder.