

Introductory statement by the Federal Chancellor at the press conference after the Conference of Minister-Presidents (MPK).

FEDERAL CHANCELLOR DR. MERKEL: Ladies and gentlemen, today we held discussions during a video conference, including the two Minister-Presidents to my left and right. These discussions took place in a very serious situation. We are all aware that many people, probably millions of people, have awaited these discussions today with great anticipation, but also with concern. With everything that we have discussed and decided today, we of course always had these people in mind - on the one hand their health, but on the other hand also their jobs and their economic situation.

Before I explain the decisions in detail, I would like to briefly highlight what makes the current pandemic situation so serious. The point is that the speed at which the virus is spreading is particularly high. We are experiencing an exponential increase in the numbers, with doubling times which have reduced even further. Today, for example, there were twice as many new infections as a week ago. The situation is similar with other relevant indicators, for example with the very important indicator of the number of people being treated in intensive care. Here too, the numbers have doubled in the last ten days. The number of coronavirus patients who need mechanical ventilation has also doubled, and this in the last nine days. This underlines the momentum of the epidemic.

We can say that our healthcare system can still cope with this challenge today. But if this rate of infection continues, then within weeks we will reach the capacity limits of the healthcare system. For example, the German Interdisciplinary Association of Critical Care and Emergency Medicine (DIVI) has once again drawn our attention to the deteriorating situation. Therefore, it is perfectly clear: we have to act, and we have to do it now. We must take action to avoid an acute national public health emergency. We don't want to end up in this kind of health emergency. We must implement measures to prevent this.

The most important instrument - I have spoken about this very often - for combatting a pandemic is to trace the contacts of each infected person. But precisely this most important instrument is no longer available to us in many places, because the local public health offices have reached the limits of what they can trace. This essentially means that the chains of transmission can no longer be broken, and therefore that control over the spread of the virus is lost. This must be changed. We are already noticing that more and more people are infected in different areas of our infrastructure. We know that this could not only push the healthcare system to the limits of its capacity, but also the entire infrastructure of our country.

This means that the curve must be flattened again, and the number of new infections first stabilised and then reduced further, so that we will be able again to trace contacts - you are aware that we have set the limit for this to 50 new infections per 100,000 people in seven days.

We experienced in the spring that we managed to flatten and lower the curve by reducing contacts, especially through the sensible conduct and solidarity of the people - also through government action, but above all due to the sensible conduct and

solidarity of our citizens. This was a relative success in the pandemic. This allowed us several months in the summer during which we could move more freely, although the virus remained a threat. We now know that we must reduce contacts once again, and thereby also reduce the risk of infection.

This is why we now once again require a national effort in the month of November, starting on the second of November, a temporary effort which we have limited in duration to the month of November. But the Federation and the Länder will meet again two weeks after the measures take effect, to assess where we stand, and possibly also adapt measures where necessary. All this serves the purpose of being able to organise public life better in December, of course still under coronavirus conditions, but more or less the same way as we have at present.

The measures which we have adopted are tough. They are onerous. They apply to the whole country. When determining the measures, we also tried to consider the political priorities. One of these political priorities was that we naturally want to maintain the economic activity of the country as far as possible. A second priority was what we have stated very often in recent months, that we want to do everything possible to keep schools and nurseries open, possibly and preferably with improved COVID-19 guidelines. Conversely, this means that we must implement strict regulations to restrict contacts in the private sphere and in leisure activities. Today, we have taken appropriate decisions to achieve this.

In the public debate, it is often said that certain areas are not the drivers of infection, so I would once again like to emphasise that we are now at a point in which on average, we no longer know where 75 percent of the infections come from nationwide. We can only trace 25 percent of the cases. This means that we can no longer say - as we have been able to do for some time - that a certain area does not contribute to infections.

That is why, after lengthy consideration, we have decided on measures to reduce personal contacts. This means that going out in public - all of this applies with effect from 2 November - is only allowed with members of the own household and one other household, up to a maximum of ten people, but always only from two households. We also say that even in private homes as well as private institutions, private parties or celebrations in public places are unacceptable. We will strengthen the enforcement of this.

We appeal to citizens to refrain from travel for personal reasons and also from visiting relatives, if these trips are not absolutely necessary. This also applies to tourist and day trip excursions and travel. Accommodation in Germany will now only be provided for necessary and explicitly non-tourism purposes.

We are significantly restricting leisure activities: theatres, opera houses, concert halls and similar establishments, trade fairs, cinemas, amusement parks - these are just examples – swimming baths, adventure pools, saunas and spas. Of course, you can read all of this in more detail.

Events for the purposes of entertainment are prohibited.

Restaurants and cafés, as well as bars, clubs, discotheques, pubs and similar establishments will be closed. Exceptions are permitted for the delivery and collection

of food that can be taken away and consumed at home, and for the operation of canteens.

Businesses offering services will be restricted.

We will allow wholesalers and retailers to remain open, with appropriate hygiene requirements.

As I have already said, we also want to enable schools and nurseries to remain open.

We will provide exceptional financial assistance to the businesses, self-employed people, associations and institutions which are subject to the temporary closures. Compensation of up to 75% of turnover will be paid to businesses with up to 50 employees. For larger companies, we will provide support in line with the maximum amounts of state aid permissible under EU regulations. Ministers Scholz and Altmaier will finalise the details of these relief measures this week.

We want to enable working from home or remotely wherever possible, in order to also prevent contacts in this area.

Of course, we will also take special care to protect the vulnerable groups in our society. I want to explicitly state that we want to continue enabling people in retirement and care homes to receive visitors.

We have considered these measures very carefully. I know that many people say: we have created COVID-19 guidelines and have prepared ourselves. - These are important and fantastic efforts that we will all need again from December onwards - this is our plan. But in the current situation, these COVID-19 guidelines no longer have the adequate effect that we need. Because we must curb the exponential growth.

This is why today is a difficult day for political decision-makers - I want to state this explicitly - because we know what a burden this is for the people. But we must find a way to ensure health on the one hand, to avoid a national public health emergency, and on the other hand also maintain economic activity as much as possible. That is why I am very grateful that we have reached agreement after lengthy discussions. Despite very different incidence rates in the individual federal states, everyone has reached consensus. For me, this is very good news.