

Austria to enter third virus lockdown from December 26

December 18 2020



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Austria will enter its third coronavirus lockdown between December 26 and January 24, Chancellor Sebastian Kurz announced on Friday, as the country battles to bring down its infection rate.

But Kurz said those who take part in a planned series of mass testing programmes between January 15 and 17 will be allowed more freedom, such as visiting cultural events and restaurants.

Hotels and cultural venues will be expected to check test results on arrival, while the police will carry out random checks in other areas, Kurz said.

The measures were "the only possible way to re-open tourism, cultural life, restaurants and cafes during the pandemic and at the same time avoid numbers exploding again", Kurz said.

For the first three weeks of the lockdown, non-essential stores will close as will services such as hairdressers where physical proximity is unavoidable.

Movement outside the home will once again be restricted to purposes such as buying food or taking exercise.

However, from January 18, stores and restaurants will open again for those who have tested negative.

Schools will resume face-to-face teaching on the same date.

Those who do not take part in the mass tests will have to wear FFP 2 masks where otherwise a simpler face covering would suffice, for example while at work or buying food.

Rules surrounding how and whether to allow outdoor sports—including skiing—will be left for local authorities to determine.

Since Austria came out of its last lockdown earlier this month, the daily rate of new infections has mostly stayed between 2,000 and 3,000 per

day but Kurz said on Friday that the aim was to bring the seven-day incidence of new cases under 100 per 100,000 inhabitants.

The government said the latest lockdown would be the first of three phases in fighting the pandemic.

The second phase will include weekly testing for professions including teachers and those who serve customers in shops and restaurants, with care home workers tested twice a week.

The third phase is the mass vaccination campaign, expected to begin on 27 December in tandem with countries across the EU.

But nevertheless Kurz warned the prognosis for the first few months of 2021 was "very, very gloomy", with a return to normality only expected in the summer.

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