# Austria re-imposes partial lockdown as COVID-19 surges across Europe

**Alex Lantier**
**20 November 2021**

After the Austrian government imposed a partial lockdown yesterday and mandatory vaccination, it is clear that European governments' politically criminal policy of "living with the virus" has created a disaster. Europe faces the largest wave of the pandemic so far, with between 300,000 and 400,000 daily new cases and 4,000 COVID-19 deaths per day.

With 15,809 cases yesterday, Austria is one of many European countries reporting the highest-ever daily new COVID-19 cases. These include Germany (64,164 Thursday), the Netherlands (23,591 Thursday), Czechia (22,507 Wednesday), Slovakia (8,342 Wednesday) and Hungary (21,058 on Monday). Cases are doubling once every one or two weeks, threatening to overwhelm hospitals.

In Austria, conditions are back to those when the pandemic began. Hospital morgues are full, and hospitals are setting up triage centers to pick who will be treated and who will be left to die.

"Corpses are overflowing and stacked in corridors," a nurse in Upper Austria told APA. "No one outside can know what this means," she added, stressing the psychological toll of not being able to prepare the body in a dignified way: "You put someone who died of coronavirus in a sealed plastic bag, close the zip, and that's it. … We are swimming in COVID."

In Salzburg and Upper Austria provinces, over 1.5 percent of the population is currently infected. On Wednesday, a spokesman for the state clinics of Salzburg province told *Morgen Post*: "We have not yet implemented triage, but it may be a question only of a few days."

Much of Europe is only a few days behind. Dutch hospitals in Rotterdam and Limburg province will soon cancel non-COVID-19 care, including for cancer patients whose treatment has been delayed by the pandemic and who are now in critical condition. German hospitals in Bavaria are sending overflow patients to Italy.

The head of Germany's Robert Koch Institute, immunologist Lothar Wieler, demanded urgent official action. "We don't have to keep inventing something new. All the ideas and prescriptions we need are available," Wieler said. "After 21 months, I simply can't stand it that what I'm saying and what other colleagues are saying is still not being accepted. … We are currently in a serious emergency. We will really have a very bad Christmas if we don't change course now."

Since the pandemic began in Europe in February-March 2020, there have been vast improvements in knowledge of the virus, and protective equipment and effective vaccines are available. One must ask: How can it be that one of the richest areas of the world is again suffering a catastrophe?

This disaster flows directly from politically criminal policies of mass infection aimed at minimizing the cost of public health measures to governments and keeping workers on the job to pump out profits for the financial aristocracy. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson spoke for the entire European bourgeoisie when he told his aides: "No more f*cking lockdowns, let the bodies pile high in their thousands!" After months in which European governments ignored the spread of the virus, rejecting lockdowns or mask mandates, Britain's psychopathic prime minister is getting his wish.

Governments across Europe insisted that vaccination meant the rise of cases could be ignored. The British government said its "plan" was to "transition from pandemic to endemic," that is, to let the virus spread permanently unchecked in the population. This same plan was followed across Europe, as officials made clear that once vaccines were available, they would no longer tolerate significant spending on measures to limit contagion.

"The rise is taking place across Europe, unsurprisingly," French Health Minister Olivier Véran

said last month in *Libération*. "However, we know that vaccination has strongly limited the correlation between the number of infections and the number of serious cases, hospitalizations and deaths," he continued. His concern, Véran added, is "mainly the pressure on hospitals."

Events are exposing Véran's false claim that vaccinations break the link between rising infections and increasing serious cases or deaths. Vaccines are highly effective and must be administered as widely as possible. The contrast between Eastern Europe and more vaccinated Western Europe is a stark and tragic reminder. With fewer reported daily cases, there are more daily deaths in Russia (1,254), Ukraine (725), Poland (403) or Romania (254) than in Germany (230) or Britain (157).

Vaccinated people can however catch and transmit the virus, and vaccines substantially reduce but do not totally eliminate the risk of serious illness after infection. With large parts of the population still unvaccinated, including children, this means that many of the infected fall seriously ill, require critical care and struggle with Long COVID if they survive.

The only way to avert a further, truly catastrophic loss of life is to mobilize workers internationally against the European Union, fighting to eliminate all transmission of COVID-19 with scientific public health policies, including strict lockdowns and universal vaccination. Bitter experience teaches that the measures now being discussed will not halt mass deaths.

Austria has turned 180 degrees, announcing yesterday a partial lockdown, closing nonessential shops, limiting the right to go out and encouraging Austrians where possible to work from home. However, workers whose workplaces are still open are required to go to work, and schools will stay open for their children. Many studies have shown that around 60 percent of infections take place in workplaces and schools, so such a partial lockdown does not prevent mass infections.

Indeed, similar lockdowns were implemented across much of Europe a year ago. They kept hospitals from collapsing but did not prevent catastrophe. From October 2020 to April 2021, over 700,000 people died in Europe. The World Health Organization (WHO) projected last month that 500,000 people will die of COVID-19 in Europe by February 1.

In other areas—including Slovakia, the Netherlands, and several regions of Italy—authorities are considering a partial lockdown but only for non-vaccinated individuals. This provocative measure, which Austria briefly imposed earlier this week before discarding it as ineffective, will not halt contagion. Vaccinated individuals also transmit the virus.

In Germany, where talks are ongoing to form a new government, officials are making contradictory statements. "We need to quickly put a brake on the exponential rise" of the contagion, said outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel, calling the pandemic situation "dramatic." However, the outgoing government is not taking action, and officials of incoming ruling parties are demanding nothing be done.

"We cannot make the number of infections go down," gloated Green Party politician Katrin Göring-Eckardt. "Many more people will be infected and sick." She stressed, "Schools and day care centers should stay open as long as possible."

If such murderous policies are adopted, the German health care system will collapse in weeks, or perhaps even days. Doctors and scientists studying the pandemic, like Professor Kristan Schneider of Mittweida University, are urgently calling for a strict lockdown, like those implemented in several European countries after mass strikes in March 2020.

"A strict lockdown, with limitations on movement and school closures could change things," Schneider told ARD, "as it would prevent contact and infections. … Generalized mandatory vaccination slightly improves the situation in the simulation, but it is too late to halt the current infection surge. Previously, especially drastic measures have also been especially effective. An emergency brake with mandatory vaccination would now be the most advisable."

Implementing such policies depends on the international mobilization of the working class, independently of the establishment parties and the union bureaucracies, in a conscious political struggle against Europe's capitalist governments and for the elimination of the coronavirus.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**wsws.org/contact**