

Latest news and bulletin updates

New Zealand versus Europe (who's winning the COVID-19 battle?)

Vaccine protests erupt across Europe - will the UK mandate vaccines?

By Shazreen Hussain



Presently, Europe is in the grips of yet another wave of COVID-19 cases. In the UK, cases have been increasing, with 40,941 cases recorded on 20 November 2021 alone. Whilst vaccines have been a key to lifting lockdown restrictions and bringing European life back to normal, cases continue to swirl to hazardous levels which is sparking a renewed lockdown in Austria.

With vaccines helping countries to unlock and operate as normal - could other countries make vaccination mandatory? To answer that, Austria (apart from a renewed lockdown) is the first Western nation to mandate vaccines in the wake of soaring cases.

Officials in Austria are working on a vaccine mandate which will be introduced from 1 February 2022, with the likelihood of fines for those who don't comply. At present, the age at which vaccines will be mandatory has not yet been set, and there will be exemptions on medical grounds. Alongside this, a new lockdown from 22 November 2021, has initiated protests across Austria with people required to work from home and non-essential shops closing. About 15,809 cases were reported in Austria on 21 November 2021 out of a population of nine million.

In addition to this, Germany may be close to introducing lockdown measures too, with the country in the clutches of a fourth wave. There have also been protests against COVID-19 restrictions in the UK, Croatia, Italy, Switzerland, Northern Ireland, and the Netherlands on the weekend of 20 and 21 November 2021. Health Secretary Sajid Javid has now said that the UK would not propose mandatory vaccination for the public. The Health Secretary said it is up to Austria and other nations to determine what

they need to do. He stated that on a practical level, taking a vaccine should be a positive decision, and should be something the UK Government should work alongside the reluctant people by encouraging them. In terms of mandatory vaccines for the public, Javid said he does not think that is something they would ever look at.

So far, the UK has issued at least 111,082,929 vaccines. Under the assumption every individual need two doses, nearly, 83.1 percent of Brits have been vaccinated. A vaccine mandate would not be issued in the UK for the broader population, nevertheless, some occupations will require the vaccine. National Health Service staff and home workers are required to get jabbed - with exemptions for those who have a medical reason or do not have face-to-face contact.

Germany set to make Covid vaccines compulsory as Europe left crippled by virus surge

Following a spike in COVID-19 cases, Germany is set to become the latest European nation to make vaccines compulsory. Experts and ministers said a move to make vaccines compulsory was "unavoidable" as the country wrestled with its fourth coronavirus surge. The European powerhouse noted 48,201 infections on 20 November 2021 - the greatest number of new Covid cases since the start of the pandemic.

This follows Austria's approach which makes vaccinations compulsory from 1 February 2022 and was preparing to push itself into a fierce 20-day lockdown from 22 November 2021. The World Health Organisation ("WHO") said Europe was the only region in the globe where COVID-19 related deaths had increased.



Thomas Bareiß a German politician said it is no longer politically arguable that entire industries, retailers, restaurants, bars, clubs, cinemas, cultural and event scenes live in a state of crisis prescribed by the state for 20 months and are faced with great existential

uncertainties, while others are worried to take the freedom not to vaccinate. Bareiß added, historical measures and sums of money have been able to save numerous companies, however, that is not feasible in the long run.

Germany's health minister Jens Spahn said he would not exclude the Austrian-style full lockdown. Spahn said at present the country is in a national emergency where they can't rule anything out. Jürgen Graf a senior official in the Ministry of Health stated the situation is critical and what they are currently doing is crisis management as Covid affects everyone.



Germany has already announced a ban on unvaccinated individuals from restaurants and shops. It comes as the latest study by The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine which projected Europe could face a further 300,000 deaths and one million people in hospital if Covid restrictions aren't tightened further over winter.

In the meantime, while Austria is set to plunge back into a nationwide lockdown from 22 November 2021, the Czech Republic and Slovakia have imposed lockdowns on the unvaccinated while Italian politicians play with the idea. It comes as raging anti-lockdown protesters fought with police in the Netherlands, Austria, Italy, and Belgium over the weekend of 20 and 21 November 2021.

In Brussels, tens of thousands of people demonstrated through central Brussels on 21 November 2021 to protest against reinforced COVID19 restrictions imposed by the Belgian Government to counter the latest spike in coronavirus cases.

Many among the police estimate of 35,000 persons at the rally had already left for home when the demonstration descended into violence as several hundred people started pelting police, smashing cars, and setting garbage bins ablaze. Police replied with tear gas and water cannons and sought to restore order when dusk settled on the Belgian capital. Police spokesperson Ilse Vande Keere said: "We have injuries, but we cannot yet say how many."

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It was also unclear how many people were arrested. Screaming "Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!" and singing the anti-fascist song *Bella Ciao*, protesters lined up behind a huge banner saying, "Together for Freedom" and rallied to the European Union headquarters.

Thousands of demonstrators gathered in Milan and Rome to protest against the Green pass certificates, the vaccine passports required at the country's cinemas, restaurants, stadiums, theaters, gyms, or clubs effective 20 November 2021. In Vienna, protesters congregated to protest after the far-right opposition Freedom Party called for demonstrations and vowed to fight new COVID-19 restrictions. The crowd of 35,000 chanted "no to vaccination", "enough is enough" and "down with the fascist dictatorship" and waved Austrian flags as they stream into Heroes' Square, resulting in 10 arrests.



In the Netherlands, anti-riot police used water cannons to break up a brutal crowd of protesters who firebombed a police car and set off fireworks in one of Rotterdam's main shopping districts as they railed against the country's partial three-week Covid lockdown. Dutch police have revealed that 51 individuals have been arrested, with about half of them being minors. A number of protests against COVID-19 restrictions also took place in Croatia, Switzerland, Italy, and Northern Ireland on 20 November 2021.

The most recent wave is already overwhelming hospitals in Germany, with health chiefs alerting the situation had become "extremely critical". Germany's vaccination rate has remained tenaciously low at 70 percent, making it exceptionally prone to a resurgence of the virus. Thomas Bareiß said the deteriorating state of affairs meant mandatory vaccinations were "unavoidable".

Is the WHO worried about Europe? According to WHO statistics, Europe was the only region in the world where COVID-19 related deaths surged last week. The global health agency has said it is "very worried" as Europe fights the fresh wave of COVID-19 infections. While speaking to the BBC, the regional director Dr. Hans Kluge estimates that by March 2022 500,000 more deaths could be recorded unless urgent action is taken.

Dr. Kluge said an increase in wearing a mask could directly assist, together with an increase in vaccine uptake. He added that COVID-19 has become once



again the number one cause of death in the region. Factors like insufficient vaccine coverage, the winter season, and the dominance of the Delta variant were causing the spread in Europe, Dr. Kluge stated. He called for increased COVID-19 vaccine uptake and the implementation of basic public health procedures and the latest medical treatments to help fight the spread. Dr. Kluge said that mandatory vaccinations should be seen as a "last resort", but it would be "very timely" to have a "legal and societal debate" about the matter.

Austria back in lockdown as protesters rally against the new restrictions and COVID-19 passes!

From midnight on 22 November 2021, Austrians have been asked to work from home and non-essential shops have closed. This is Austria's fourth national lockdown since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Authorities have ordered residents to stay home for all but essential reasons, including work, exercise, and shopping for food.

Restaurants, bars, hairdressers, theatres, and non-essential shops must all close their doors. These measures will continue until 12 December 2021, although officials said they will be re-evaluated after 10 days. Austria's health minister Wolfgang Mueckstein said the Government had to "react now". A lockdown, a relatively tough approach, a sledgehammer, is the only option to reduce the numbers, he said.



Tens of thousands of people protested in the capital Vienna ahead of the lockdown. Brandishing national flags and banners reading "Freedom", protesters shouted "Resistance!" and booed the cops. Resinger Harald, a 62-year-old from the southern Carinthia region, is fully vaccinated and feels the lockdown is not necessary. "It will hurt some of the smaller businesses severely and they might run into financial difficulties," she told the BBC.

On another note – the NZ Cabinet gave an update on alert levels and the traffic light system!

Here's everything you need to know about it:

- The Cabinet is thinking about winter and Covid, and they are looking at what's happening in Europe. There's no end date for the traffic light framework, it accepts that COVID is around and it's still challenging in some parts of the globe.
- From 11.59pm on Thursday, 2 December 2022, the whole country will move into the new traffic light system.
- Auckland will move to **red**; no region will move to **green**.
- Cabinet will decide at the end of this month which level each region moves to. Vaccination rates will play a role in this decision.
- Thursday, 25 November 2021, hairdressers, and barbers in Auckland can reopen if they require vaccine passes from customers and only take bookings. This is a trial of the vaccine pass system. All staff must also be fully vaccinated.
- Simplified vaccination assessment tools will be able for us mid-December to help employers decide if they require vaccination for different types of work.
- Workers covered by the My Vaccine Pass mandate need to have their first dose by 3 December and be fully vaccinated by 17 January 2022.
- The verifier app has been tested. It will be available for businesses this week.
- In the traffic light system, if you're vaccinated, you can do almost everything as you normally would, but there may be some gathering limits at times.

Resources

- Ministry of Health (www.health.govt.nz)
- Work and Income (www.workandincome.govt.nz)
- Inland Revenue (www.ird.govt.nz)
- Covid-19 Official Site (www.covid19.govt.nz)
- BCC News (www.bbc.com)
- Stuff Official Site (www.stuff.co.nz)

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