



**Fédération Européenne
des Médecins Salariés**
European Federation
of Salaried Doctors

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FALL REPORT AUSTRIA – FEMS SEPTEMBER 2020

Covid-19 situation in Austria

Status: 04.09.2020 (10.00)

Tests performed so far: 1.236.489

Cases confirmed overall: 28.529

Current active cases: 3.481

In hospital: 156

Intensive care unit: 28

Persons recovered: 24.513

Confirmed deaths: 727

After Austria successfully restricted the spread of COVID-19 in the first half of the year, a rise in cases has been observed since July. While infections remain relatively low compared to the beginning of the pandemic, the fall and winter months as well as the upcoming flu season provide challenges.

Overview of measures since the beginning of the pandemic

In March, the Austrian government enacted a new law aimed at reducing the spread of Covid-19 (“Bundesgesetz betreffend vorläufige Maßnahmen zur Verhinderung der Verbreitung von COVID-19”) and adapted a number of other laws to tackle the pandemic. A large number of regulations were also released over the course of the last six months, providing rules for the population aimed at restricting the spread of the virus. Early measures included a strict curfew, the closure of all non-essential businesses, and requirements to wear nose and mouth protectors in shops, public transport and other public places. A voluntary contact-tracing app was made available for all citizens and free testing was provided via the Austrian health hotline. These measures resulted in a relatively low number of deaths and allowed Austria to avoid a collapse of its healthcare system. However, while case numbers dropped, the unemployment numbers grew and the economic impact was significant (the Austrian GDP dropped by 12,8% in the second quarter of 2020).

A gradual loosening of restrictions began in April, while certain measures, such as the ban of large-scale events as well as the mandatory wearing of nose-mouth-protectors on public transport and in the health sector remained in place. The backlog of procedures and surgeries that were postponed due to COVID-19 has mostly been cleared since procedures were picked up again at the end of April.

Current restrictions

In August, the Austrian Supreme Court declared a large number of the regulations, including the curfew, as illegal. With case numbers rising again since July, the Austrian government has re-introduced the mandatory wearing of nose-mouth-protectors in certain areas of public life, including supermarkets, and has released a number of non-binding recommendations, including the maintenance of a distance of one meter and avoiding private gatherings with more than 25 persons. Additional safety regulations have been introduced regionally under the

purview of the regional governments. For example, Carinthia has developed stricter rules for the wearing of masks and Vienna will provide free flu vaccinations.

Entry restrictions remain in place for travellers arriving from high-risk areas, who are obligated to provide a negative PCR test and entry is prohibited for third-country nationals, with certain exemptions.

After widespread shortages of PPE in the beginning of the pandemic, Austria currently has enough PPE, in particular due to deliveries from China, increased production in Austria and self-made masks. Previously introduced measures have ensured that the Austrian health care system is well equipped to deal with rising numbers of cases. These measures include hospitals specifically dedicated to COVID-19 response, triage and co-operation between hospitals and resident doctors/private practices.

While there is a backlog of tests, leading to a delay of a few days in the provision of results, testing remains widely available, including by private providers. However, the Austrian Medical Chamber has recommended that a test should only be required if a doctor confirms a suspected COVID-19 case.

Way ahead

In September, the Austrian government released a Corona “Ampel” (traffic light), which indicates the risk of corona infection based on four parameters: the number of new cases in the last seven days, whether a source of new cases can be determined, available resources, as well as the results of tests in the last seven days. The light will be updated weekly and is meant to provide an overview of the current situation across the country and provide guidance for residents and decision makers. It will also allow the regional governments and the federal state to decide on further mandatory measures, where necessary.