Belgium enforces new Covid restrictions and Germany warns of 'dramatic' measures as Europe fights rising cases

Germans have been warned that the country could face a "really terrible Christmas" as it reported record coronavirus cases amid the escalating surge across Europe.

Chancellor Angela Merkel said the situation was "dramatic" as the Robert Koch Institute reported 65,371 new cases in 24 hours on Thursday. "If enough people get vaccinated, that is the way out of the pandemic," she added.

The disease agency's director, Lothar Wieler, said Germany needs to increase its vaccination rates to significantly above 75 per cent, from 67.7 per cent at present, a comparatively low figure for the continent. Some German regions have vaccination rates as low as 57.6 per cent.

"We are currently heading toward a serious emergency," said the agency's warning that hospitals were running short of beds. "We are going to have a really terrible Christmas if we don't take countermeasures now."

He called for the closure of clubs and bars, an end to large-scale events and access to many parts of public life to be limited to those who are vaccinated, as German politicians debated new measures on Thursday. Many regions have already excluded unvaccinated people from cinemas, restaurants and bars.

It came as Belgium announced tougher restrictions in response to a rapid rise in coronavirus infections, including a return to home working four days a week and mandatory face coverings.

People will need proof of vaccination or a negative test to enter cafes and restaurants and nightclubs will introduce testing for those who want to dance mask-free.

Belgium is now the European Union's highest ranking country in its rate of Covid-19 infections, at around one per hundred people over the past 14 days, just behind Austria. Prime minister Alexander De Croo told a news conference: "We had all hoped to have a winter without coronavirus, but Belgium is not an island."

A mid-December peak is looming for the continent, with leaders in countries including Ireland already reimposing restrictions.

Virologists in the Netherlands, which was the first western European country to reimpose a partial lockdown last week, have proposed extending the Christmas holidays to slow a surge in Covid-19 cases among children that has forced half [fake us passport maker](#) of schools to shut.

Infections jumped to a record 23,600 on Thursday as the country's National Institute for Health (RIVM) reported a weekly record of more than 110,000 cases to 16 November, an increase of 44 per cent from the week before. The strongest rise was among children aged 4-12. Infections among children of primary school age, five to nine, jumped almost 85 per cent and rose 76 per cent among children aged 10-14.

"Keeping primary schools closed for longer is an effective way to keep the virus under control," immunologist Ger Rijkers told the Algemeen Dagblad newspaper. "Children are virus factories and infect adults as well as each other."

The wave began after the government ended social distancing and other measures in September. Caretaker Prime Minister Mark Rutte's proposal to exclude the non-vaccinated from a pass for indoor events has faced opposition in parliament. The government will discuss new measures on Friday.

Greece and the Czech Republic on Thursday said that from Monday, unvaccinated people will be barred from venues including restaurants, cinemas and gyms.

Spain is expanding its booster programme by lowering the threshold from 70 to all over 60s. With 79 per cent of the population vaccinated, the push to Spain's vaccination campaign follows a surge in infections in the past two weeks with a rapid rise from 89 per 100,000 on Tuesday to 96 per 100,000 by Wednesday.

The use of vaccine passports is being considered in Sweden, meaning only those who have been fully vaccinated will be permitted entry to indoor events with a capacity of more than 100 people. The centre-left government was preparing a parliament bill to be put forward which would see mandatory vaccination passes coming into effect by 1 December. Health Minister Lena Hallengren told a news conference: "The spread is increasing in Europe. We haven't seen it yet in Sweden, but we are **fake passport generator for fun** not isolated."

France on Wednesday registered more than 20,000 new cases per day for the first time since 25 August as its fifth wave picks up speed.. Hospitalised patients rose by more than 10 per cent week-on-week for the second day in a row.

Slovakia's Prime Minister Eduard Heger has called "a lockdown for the unvaccinated" from Monday as a rising tide of infections and hospital admissions burden overstretched hospitals. The decision comes after cases hit a record 8,342 on Tuesday. Only people who have been vaccinated or have contracted Covid-19 in the past six months will be allowed to enter restaurants, shopping malls and public events. Unvaccinated people will face testing in workplaces in all but the least-affected regions.

Slovakia has one of the European Union's lowest vaccination rates, with 45 per cent of the total population vaccinated versus the EU average of 65 per cent. In regions with higher infection rates, further restrictions will be implemented even for those vaccinated, including takeaway-only at restaurants.

Austrian officials are facing pressure to reimpose a full Covid-19 lockdown after reaching a record 15,145 cases on Thursday with many of its worst-hit provinces implementing restrictions themselves. Austria has issued a lockdown for the unvaccinated, but its infections continue to represent some of the highest in the continent (971.5 per 100,000 people).

With only 66 per cent of Austria's population fully vaccinated, it has one of the lowest rates in western Europe. Upper Austria, a stronghold of the far-right and vaccine-criticising Freedom Party, has the country's highest

infection rate and its lowest vaccination rate. "If no national lockdown is ordered tomorrow, there will definitely have to be a lockdown of several weeks in Upper Austria together with our neighbouring province Salzburg as of next week," said Upper Austria governor Thomas Stelzer.