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Austria to Mandate COVID Vax for All Adults

Austrian parliamentarians voted to force virtually all adult citizens to get vaccinated against COVID-19, with those who refuse facing fines of up to €3,600 (\$4,000) starting February 1.

In a 137-33 vote on Thursday, the Austrian National Council, the lower house of parliament, approved a measure to make vaccines mandatory for every citizen older than 18 except for pregnant women, people who are advised against vaccination on health grounds, and those who have recovered from COVID-19 in the previous six months, [Associated Press](#) reports.



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The bill is now heading to the upper house, where it will most certainly pass without much ado since Austria's governing parties — a coalition of the center-right People's Party and the Greens — hold a majority in the chamber.

The country's top officials argue the sweeping vaccine mandate is necessary because vaccination rates remain "too low," which, they believe, puts at risk the country's healthcare system.

Minister of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection Wolfgang Mückstein, speaking in parliament during the deliberations, called the mandate a "big, and, for the first time, also lasting step" that would ensure the country is on top of the pandemic, per the report.

Mückstein believes that by ensuring nearly all eligible adults receive the vaccine, Austria would "escape the cycle of opening and closing, of lockdowns." He added that that policy will ensure Austrians are ready for all future strains of the virus, not just Omicron. While it is unclear from the AP report if the bill in its current iteration contains a provision on mandatory boosters, such a measure was [included](#) in the original draft. That draft also included a four-week imprisonment as a punishment for those who are unable to pay the fine.

The other indication that Austrians will be legally required to get boosted is that earlier in January the government [announced](#) that it would invalidate the vaccine passports of those folks who do not get their boosters after six months from the initial inoculation.

The conservative Freedom Party, which opposed the bill, [said](#) the mandate was a "blow to Austrians' freedoms" [which](#) "paves the way to totalitarianism in Austria."

Under the new rules, the police will start checking the vaccination papers of adults in mid-March. Those who cannot prove they've been jabbed will be slapped with a €600 fine. The report adds that if authorities "judge the country's vaccination progress still to be insufficient," the government would send "reminders" to the unvaccinated to go and get a jab. "If even that doesn't work, people would be sent a vaccination appointment and fined if they don't keep it. Officials hope they won't need to use the last measure. Fines could reach €3,600 if people contest their punishment and full proceedings are opened," according to the report.



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The mandate is set to last until the end of January 2024. “An expert commission” is tasked to report to the government and parliament every three months on vaccination progress, the Associated Press adds.

The same day, Chancellor Karl Nehammer unveiled a plan to invest €1.4 billion (\$1.59 billion) in “efforts and incentives” to bribe unvaccinated people to get the jab. Of that sum, €1 billion (\$1.1 billion) will go toward a national “vaccination lottery” beginning March 15, when all those who get a COVID shot will have “an almost certain” [one-in-three](#) chance to win a €500 (\$566) gift voucher, while the remaining €400 million (\$452 million) will be sent to towns that reach a certain vaccination rate. Other media [reports](#) that those who have already been vaccinated could claim a ticket for each shot they have received, meaning those who get a booster dose would qualify for three tickets. The vouchers are intended to be spent on shopping, tourism, hospitality services, and on cultural and sports events.

Also on Thursday, the Main Committee of the National Council [extended](#) the so-called COVID-19 Protective Measures Ordinance, or, simply put, a lockdown of the unvaccinated, by a further 10 days.

The measure barring the unvaxxed from entering indoor public places and attending events [was put in place](#) in early November, and was [extended](#) to the entire population later that month. In December, those 67 percent of the Australians who had taken a COVID shot [were allowed](#) to attend movie theaters, museums, and other cultural and entertainment venues. The remaining three million citizens were ordered to follow stay-at-home restrictions.

Since November, Austria’s vaccination rate rose to 73 percent, which puts nearly 2.5 million Austrians under unthinkable pressure to get an experimental vaccine or be fined or possibly jailed.

The country is regularly seeing massive anti-mandate protests, some of them attracting as many as 40,000 participants. The government considers them “radicals” despite the level of violence [reportedly](#) remaining very low.

Similar vaccine mandates are being introduced in some other [European countries](#), including Greece, where shots are now obligatory for everyone aged 60 and older. Italy made COVID-19 vaccination mandatory for people aged 50 and over, exempting only those who have recently recovered from the virus or who can’t take the jab for confirmed medical reasons.

Neighboring [Germany](#) is closely considering voting on a similar near-universal mandate as early as March, with the measure enjoying support of Chancellor Olaf Scholz and majority of the nation’s political parties.





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