

Austria's leader: 2nd wave of virus has begun, use caution

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In this Wednesday, Aug. 19, 2020 photo people wear face masks as they cross a street in Vienna, Austria. Austria's Chancellor Sebastian Kurz says his country is seeing the start of a "second wave" of coronavirus infections. He is appealing to his compatriots to comply with newly reinforced rules to keep down infections. (AP Photo/Ronald Zak, file)

Austria is seeing the start of a "second wave" of coronavirus infections,

the country's leader said Sunday, urging citizens to comply with reinforced rules to keep down new cases and suggesting that companies keep employees working from home if possible.

Austria had a relatively successful first phase of the pandemic but has joined other European countries in seeing a rise in infections in recent weeks. It recorded 869 new infections on Friday, the highest daily figure since late March. Chancellor Sebastian Kurz announced that day that the government would reimpose measures such as mandatory mask-wearing in shops.

Kurz stepped up his rhetoric on Sunday.

"What we are experiencing at the moment is the beginning of the second wave in Austria," he said after a government meeting with employers and worker representatives in Vienna.

About half of the new infections are in Vienna, the capital, but infections are rising across the country, Kurz said. He noted most people are getting infected at family gatherings, birthday parties and other private events, but added "these infections are often taken to work."

He said many companies have had "good experiences" with people working from home.

"It makes sense if, where companies want to, where it works well and where experiences are positive, this is continued and expanded," he added.



Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz speaks during a press conference at the federal chancellery in Vienna, Austria, Friday, Aug. 28, 2020. The Austrian government has moved to restrict freedom of movement for people, in an effort to slow the onset of the COVID-19 coronavirus. (AP Photo/Ronald Zak)

Kurz urged companies to upgrade their anti-virus safety protections at work. He said things should be back to normal next summer "but until then, autumn and winter will be very challenging."

Austria, which has about 8.9 million people, has recorded more than 33,000 infections and seen 750 virus-related deaths. Experts say all numbers in the pandemic are undercounts due to missed mild cases and limited testing.

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