

Germany expects to offer COVID jabs to all adults from June

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Germany is expecting to open up COVID-19 vaccinations to all adults in June at the latest, German Health Minister Jens Spahn said Thursday.

Spahn told the Bundesrat upper house of parliament he expected Europe's biggest economy to be able to "lift the prioritisation in June", referring to current lists deciding who gets the jabs first. He added that the move may be possible even earlier.

After a sluggish start to its vaccination campaign which kicked off in December, Germany has managed to accelerate its rollout this month.

Some 21.6 percent of the population had received a first dose by Thursday, according to official data.

But Germany has until now been bound by a strict system of priority groups drawn up by the STIKO vaccine commission, mostly defined by age.

Some German states had already this week announced plans to open up the AstraZeneca

vaccine, which has been on a roller-coaster ride in Europe, to anyone who wants it.

Germany has officially recommended the AstraZeneca jab only for people 60 and older following concerns over several blood clotting cases among younger recipients of the vaccine.

Chancellor Angela Merkel last week received her first dose of AstraZeneca.

Infection rates have remained stubbornly high in Germany over the past six months despite sweeping shutdowns.

Germany's Robert Koch Institute (RKI) health agency on Thursday reported 29,518 new infections in the past 24 hours—among the highest daily rates since the start of the pandemic.

The surge came as the Bundesrat approved a controversial amendment to the law that will give Merkel's government the power to impose uniform national virus measures, ending a tug-of-war with Germany's 16 states.

The amendment, which sparked fierce protests in Berlin as it was passed in the Bundestag lower house on Wednesday, must now be signed off by President Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

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