

Corona Update: Masking, Testing, Hygiene, Distancing and Vaccinations

Date: **February 3, 2021**

Dear AIS-Salzburg Community Members;

This letter is to cover a number of topics related to the re-opening of our dormitories and classrooms for regular instruction and supervision as of Monday, February 8, 2021. Although the general situation and its development is unpredictable and will remain so for the next couple of months minimally, we would like to communicate and clarify the policies and procedures to be put in place to further secure the health and safety of our community. Some of these will be familiar as they have been in place for some time but may require re-emphasis or an increased amount of consideration; some of these are new and recently-announced by the Austrian governmental and health authorities, thereby requiring your notice.

Allow me to state unequivocally, that the chance to have students return to the school and participate in in-class, face-to-face instruction is the *beginning* of a return to normalcy only. Conditions will be anything but normal, however. Very strict adherence to a number of health-safety requirements and restrictions will be in place which will be uncomfortable and a source of continuing irritation and agitation. Free time limitations on movement away from the school will be greatly reduced and strictly enforced. Many behaviors and expectations that a typical adolescent would desire will be impossible and/or greatly compromised for many of the coming weeks. It should come as no surprise to anyone in our community that in exchange for being able to take part in group education in the classrooms with your teachers, represents the *maximum* extent of the relaxation of health-safety requirements considered appropriate at this time. Most other aspects of public and private life will remain highly regulated and restrictive. Returning to the school as a boarder or attending classes as a day student will be possible only within very specific guidelines and measures intended to ensure that the risk of infection remains low. Those who believe that such restrictions are not necessary or act in ways that are counterproductive to this goal need not return to the school as they will disqualify themselves from taking advantage of this opportunity.

In order to give you information on the various restrictions and health-safety requirements that will be in place, we are sending you this latest communication in order to provide you with the chance to be properly prepared for the return to AIS-Salzburg without illusions, assumptions and without expectations that cannot be fulfilled.

I. Masking

The government requirements in terms of masking are clear: visits to businesses, grocery stores, and anywhere else where people are gathered together and a distance of 2 meters cannot be insured, a mask must be worn. Recently, the Austrian authorities announced that simple, paper, or homemade masks are no longer sufficient and that only FFP2-quality masks are to be utilized. FFP2 masks are more effective at not only protecting others from one's own aerosol projection, but protect the wearer from potentially-harmful aerosol emissions from others.

These FFP2 masks are required for all secondary-school students above the age of 14 while at public schools; younger students may wear normal masks. Given the size of our student body, we have decided that the FFP2 requirement should be the same for all students until the government alters or eliminates this requirement. Therefore:

General Masking Requirements for All Community Members:

- a. FFP2 masks must be worn in all public indoor spaces and in all classrooms during the instructional day whenever two or more persons are present (Monday through Friday).
- b. Whenever and at whatever time of the day a mixture of resident and non-resident students and/or staff is present in an indoor area, FFP2 masks must be worn.
- c. FFP2 masks must be worn during all transport organized by the school in school vehicles or other transport providers.
- d. FFP2 masks must be worn during activities away from campus for which government requirements are applicable (e.g. in ski lift lines, in museums, etc.)
- e. FFP2 masks may be taken off when outdoors if proper distancing is maintained.
- f. FFP2 masks are not required during outdoor physical education activities if distancing can be properly maintained.
- g. FFP2 masks are removed for dining, but distancing is to be maintained as best as is possible.
- h. Mask 'breaks' may be implemented by the teachers whereby the students are allowed to go outside and take off their masks for a short period of time before resuming instruction with masking. It is, therefore, recommended that students wear or bring their jackets to the classes.
- i. Resident students and staff need not be masked on the dormitory floors and in personal dormitory rooms. Masks are also not required for resident students and staff in other public areas of the school when no non-residents are on campus after 19:00 and on Saturdays and Sundays unless the presence of non-residents on campus requires such masking (e.g., SAT testing, etc.).

We plan to maintain a large supply of FFP2 masks at the school and distribute these to all students enrolled and in attendance at the start of the first period of instruction each morning. Old, used masks will be collected and disposed of. FFP2 masks are disposable articles and should not be used for more than one day/24 hours, otherwise their effective protection value is greatly reduced. We feel it our duty to supply such required masks to ensure that an optimal amount of health protection is insured within our community. We trust that the supply of masks available will allow us to carry out this procedure without interruption. Should a student or staff member need an additional mask due to loss or other reason, they may come to the school office and obtain a second one for one euro. Any funds collected for such replacement purchases will be applied to the costs of supplying these FFP2 masks.

Final Note on FFP2 Masking

At the most fundamental level, appropriate masking is the most essential form of protection that can be provided at this time and establishes the broadest level of health safety during this pandemic. They are uncomfortable and they inhibit the free exchange of ideas and knowledge between individuals in the classroom, no doubt. But, just as with any and all of these measures, we have to ask for compliance and cooperation in order to try and ensure that our community is as safe as possible while we enjoy the benefit of being able to provide an education which is direct and personal.

II. Covid-19 Testing

In accordance with government requirements, AIS-Salzburg will be administering SARS-Cov-2 rapid antigen tests regularly at the school. These 'quick-tests' are minimally invasive and take about two minutes to complete with a result available within 15 minutes. These tests represent a means by which the health security of the community can be checked and direct knowledge gained on our safety level. They also allow the chance to identify an infection very early and take the necessary and appropriate steps afterwards.

Testing Requirements for All Community Members:

- a. All 5-day boarding students will be tested upon their return to the school on Sundays.
- b. All full-boarding and day students will be tested at the start of Period 1 each Tuesday morning. Since all boarders will need to arrive with a recent, negative test result, only day students will be tested this coming Tuesday, February 9. All students as of Tuesday, February 16, 2021.
- c. Day students will be tested again on Thursday mornings before the start of the seminar period.
- d. Only the school's Health Coordinator (jsuttmann@ais-salzburg.at) will be collecting the results of such testing and have access to these collected results.
- e. In the case of a positive result, the Health Coordinator will immediately isolate the particular student, report the result to the local health authorities and the student's parents, and then carry out all necessary actions required by such authorities.

The reason that the school will be testing boarding students once weekly and day student twice weekly is to better comply with the latest measures imposed on Austrian public schools. Additionally, day students are not as directly restricted in their movements and contact with others as boarding students are generally; the more frequent testing rate helping to compensate for this situation.

The procedures to be carried out individually for such quick-tests are illustrated in the short video below issued by the Austrian health authorities:



III. Hygiene and Distancing

Generally speaking, the hygiene and distancing requirements that were in place before the lockdown remain in place except for an extension of safe distancing to 2 meters rather than 1.5. Hand sanitizers remain available for frequent use throughout the building and must be utilized before entering the school kitchen to take meals and after using the restroom. General hand-washing should also be done effectively and several times a day. Particular hygiene and distancing measures that AIS-Salzburg has put into effect include:

- a. Seating in classrooms will separate resident and non-resident students as effectively as possible with non-residents seated at the front of the classrooms; residents behind.
- b. dividers between non-resident students will also remain in place on the classroom desks and tables.
- c. Tabletops and desktops, door handles, etc., will be frequently disinfected by the faculty, staff and cleaning personnel both in the classrooms as well as in the dormitories.
- d. 'Mask breaks' will be carried out by teachers as frequently as possible.
- e. Classrooms and all other indoor spaces will be ventilated frequently (at least once per hour while classes are ongoing) in order to reduce the levels of aerosol contamination. Dormitory rooms will also be adequately ventilated during the day by the cleaning staff and under the direction of the resident staff during evening study halls.
- f. High-quality air sanitizers have been purchased for those classrooms in which the ability to properly ventilate the room is restricted and possibly inadequate.
- g. Distancing during the academic day between all students and staff should be at 2 meters whenever possible, even though resident students do not need to be distanced during evening hours or when non-residents are not on campus.

IV. Vaccinations and Previous Covid-19 Infections

Unfortunately, the present situation as related to vaccinations in Austria is unclear and under revision due to expectations and planning that was not matched to production, distribution and logistic capabilities. We expect that the situation will become more clear as time progresses this spring. We trust that as soon as all elderly citizens over 75 years of age, those with health conditions that put them at highest risk, as well as all health professionals are vaccinated, the situation will be relaxed somewhat. When others who are not in one of these categories will be able to get vaccinated is unclear presently, but will likely not be before April or May. At present, we are assuming that all those resident in Austria of 18 years of age minimally, qualify to eventually receive the vaccine.

V. Other Points

All students, especially full- and five-day boarding students, should review the updated [Corona Strategy Guidelines](#) before their arrival, discussing these with their parents as necessary. The present traffic-light health-risk indicator is at **RED** and is likely to stay there for the next weeks—perhaps months. Although these guidelines cannot cover all possible situations, scenarios or circumstances, they should provide the main elements of what parameters need to be in place for those who board and attend the school.

The [AIS-Salzburg Dress and Style Code](#), as mentioned previously and suspended for the first half of the school year, is back in effect as of the start of the academic day on Monday, February 8. I would encourage everyone—resident and non-resident students alike—to review these parameters of style and dress and ensure that you arrive to the school with the appropriate apparel, shoes, etc. The Dress and Style Code includes facial hair, length of male hair and other aspects that you need to be aware of as well.

It appears that ski trips will be possible under the present circumstances, provided they remain stable during the coming weeks. The resident staff is presently planning and setting up weekend ski trips to begin on February 13 or 14, 2021.

If the situation in Austria allows hotels to re-open in March as is presently planned, then we will be able to carry out our Winter Excursion to Lungau at that time. The skiing here in the Austrian Alps will continue to

be very good through the month of March and probably up to Easter in early April, so we may be able to enjoy this break as planned (with only a slight delay).

The cancelled Fall Trimester Excursions to Athens and Venice are tentatively re-scheduled for late April (21st to 25th) and we are hopeful, again, that the situation at that time will allow us to make up these very enjoyable trips so that our students can gain the benefit of traveling to such interesting destinations.

The AIS-Salzburg administration understands that many parents are concerned about the Spring Break period which has been adjusted to April 3 through 11, 2021 (one week/9 days) which may be too short a period for students to be able to return home and back again, especially given possible quarantine requirements. We will continue to discuss possible solutions to this and will inform you of these as soon as we (a) have a better idea of what the situation may be like at that time, and (b) have solutions for staffing, meals, etc., for those who may need to remain here on campus over this break.

Lastly, the school administration must concern itself with the refinement of planning for a positive infection in the school community and/or a further lockdown called for by the Austrian government whereby public schools are closed once again. Both of these situations represent conditions *in extremis* for us as well as everyone else in our community, but just hoping they don't happen would be irresponsible. Therefore, we will be discussing any and all aspects of such eventualities and creating a workable, communicated protocol which can be put into effect if need be.

As always, I thank you all for your continued attention, patience, as well as your ongoing support. I really don't know how other boarding schools are doing given the challenges we all face, but I would like to state for the record that the students, parents, and staff of AIS-Salzburg have all shown a remarkably consistent level of cohesiveness, understanding, cooperation and personal effort and sacrifice which I appreciate very, very much. Thank you all.

Yours,



Paul McLean
Headmaster