



## Important Information for Incoming Students for the 2021-2022 School Year

As we now enter the second half of July, 2021, it is necessary to address the Corona situation in Salzburg and Austria and the way the situation may affect the upcoming school year in September. Predictions in times such as these are notoriously difficult, but we believe that there are a few indications that we regularly keep an eye on that will, indeed, provide a backdrop of possible restrictions or other requirements affecting programming this fall.

### I. Present Situation in Salzburg, Austria

The current situation is excellent and the numbers of both positive infections as well as hospitalizations remain very low in comparison with last spring. At present, the 7-day incidence rate (number of infections per 100,000 people over seven days) is at 27 in the city and the average number of new infections per day in the entire province is around 23 for the past week. Hospitalizations are also significantly down with only 2 cases presently, neither requiring intensive care.

However, the situation in a pandemic is never static and any trend noticeable can give cause for concern. Although the situation today is quite positive, the development is in the opposite direction with the Delta Mutation causing a lot of concern for virologists here in Austria. Presently, around 50% of all infections are being caused by this very-infectious variant and expectations are that numbers will soon begin to rise much higher across the board. Today (July 20th), the laboratories in Salzburg Province reported 83 infections, raising the local, 7-day incidence rate to 53. The numbers are going up particularly strongly in the mountainous regions of the province south of Salzburg city.

Should this trend continue through the month and into August—which it is expected to do, given the high number of Austrian residents presently traveling and vacationing outside of the country—we can expect the government to maintain many of the present restrictions and other anti-pandemic measures into the fall of 2021.

### II. Present Restrictions and Safety Measures in Salzburg

The most important aspect of the restrictions presently in place is the so-called '3G Rule'. The name comes from the German terms, '*Geimpft*' (vaccinated), '*Genesen*' (recovered) and '*Getestet*' (tested). These three qualifications are being applied broadly in Austria this summer and may remain in place through the fall. They apply to all persons in Austria aged 12 and older (age 6 and older in Vienna presently). The government defines these three levels of qualification in the following ways:

1. **Vaccinated** (*geimpft*) means that one can prove that they have received both doses (or a single dose of some vaccines) of an EU-approved vaccine, the final shot being more than 22 days previous.
2. **Recovered** (*Genesen*) means that one can prove they had the Covid-19 infection and recovered from this as proven by official medical documentation. This allowance qualifies for up to six months after the period of infection.
3. **Tested** (*getestet*) means that one can provide either (a) a self-test with authorization which is less than 24 hours old, (b) an antigen test which is less than 48 hours old or, (c) a PCR test which is less than 72 hours old.

Proof of one of these three health qualifications must be shown in order to enter Austria (from all but those nations that are considered at high-risk presently - please see <https://www.austria.info/en/service-and-facts/coronavirus-information/entry-regulations> for the latest updates on these) as well as the opportunity to enjoy the following services:

- hotel accommodations
- restaurants, cafes and other gastronomic services
- theaters, movie houses and other entertainment services
- physical services provided by hairdressers, make-up/nails salons and physical therapies
- hospitals, retirement homes and other health care facilities
- museums, art galleries, opera houses, concert halls and other cultural facilities
- sports and physical training facilities including gyms that are indoors

In addition to meeting the '3G' requirement, many of the above-mentioned services are required to have customers register their presence either electronically or on a physical sheet. Also, the Austrian national, provincial and local governments require masking on all public transportation and in any enclosed areas including grocery stores and other businesses or service centers, as well as in any area outdoors where larger groups of people may be gathered together without significant space between them. Otherwise, distancing requirements have been dropped at present. In the coming days, the government is meeting to discuss lifting some of these masking requirements (in stores other than groceries and other businesses).

### **III. Austrian Public Schools**

The Austrian Education Ministry has announced that their intention is that all Austrian public schools will be open for face-to-face instruction in the classrooms this September. They have also announced that all students and staff nationwide, will be tested three times during the first two weeks of school as well in order to identify any threats to health that may result from recent travel or otherwise—starting the school year with some security and certainty. AIS-Salzburg will also be testing all students upon arrival at the school and will also be carrying out regular testing during the first two weeks (self-tests).

If the national infection situation requires further measures, the Education Ministry will likely increase the period of testing and possibly revert to masking requirements for a time if need be. However, they hope that with the growing number of vaccinations among the Austrian populace, regular programming, including sports, music, and outings, will be able to go forward as during a normal school year. The Education Ministry is strongly urging all students and staff members in public schools age 12 and above to get the vaccination before the school year begins as the age-group with the highest number of positive cases is within this population (16 to 25).

### **IV. Vaccinations**

65.2% of the Austrian population has received at least the first shot of the vaccine and 51.7% have received the full vaccination as of today. However, these percentages are growing at a slower-than-expected rate despite the fact that the government is offering free vaccinations to all members of the population 12 years of age and older. Given the expert opinion that true herd immunity cannot occur until vaccination rates rise above 85% of the population minimally, it appears that there will remain a significant number of people who can be infected, many of them experiencing potentially serious symptoms and once again threatening the level of health care that needs to be provided them by Austrian hospitals.

At AIS-Salzburg, all staff members will be fully vaccinated by the start of the school year. This includes the kitchen and cleaning staff as well as the entire teaching faculty, resident-care staff and administration.

### **V. A New Development**

Interestingly, although the number of infections is presently on the rise across Europe, the number of individuals exhibiting serious symptoms that require hospitalization remains low and far from hospital ICU-bed capacities. It seems that the Delta Mutation, although much more infectious, does not seem to result in symptoms as debilitating as previously-identified strains of the virus. In light of this, many Austrian government and health experts are urging that the numbers of those hospitalized should be the more

important data factor in considering possible health protection measures, rather than the total number of positive infections. This is seen as a potentially mitigating factor in determinations as to how the government reacts in the coming months.

## **VI. A Prognosis for the Fall**

If we assume that the present rise in infections and the experts' concern for the growing number of Delta variation cases (or other, new mutations of the virus) will increase over the next two months, we can expect that the above-mentioned restrictions and health protection measures will likely remain in place when the school year begins at AIS-Salzburg on September 4th. If this is the case, the government's restrictions, especially the '3G' requirements, will inhibit several aspects of free-time movement and activities that the school allows or organizes—*at least for those students and staff members who cannot meet the '3G' requirements*. Students who are not vaccinated, do not have proof of a recent negative test and/or do not have proof of recovery from Covid-19 would, in such a case, not be allowed to enter stores, take meals in restaurants or cafes, enjoy museums, concerts, films or other activities, whether planned by the school or engaged in these during free time. It may also be the case that they may not be able to participate in any indoor sports activities, team practices or regular, required physical education classes as well. This concern remains speculative at this time, but we consider it a high priority to prepare for this possible scenario.

*Can testing be done at such a level as to avoid these restrictions for AIS-Salzburg students who are not vaccinated?* There are indications that the government is planning to stop free testing in Salzburg and throughout Austria by the end of the summer and may then begin charging a significant sum of money (€50 has been proposed) for individual, PCR tests (proposed as the only valid test result acceptable). This debate includes the idea that if PCR tests are no longer freely offered, many more people will decide to get vaccinated. There is also discussion that self-tests, such as those given the students at AIS-Salzburg on a regular basis, will no longer be acceptable for meeting the '3G' requirements; effectively eliminating this opportunity for our non-vaccinated student residents.

The school cannot require or demand that all students enrolled be vaccinated against Covid-19. However, it seems that given certain eventualities, it may be the key to full participation and engagement in AIS-Salzburg programming this fall. The disadvantages that may be experienced by non-vaccinated students in our school would not be imposed by the school administration or our internal policies, but would be required by national Austrian law, the adherence to which we are bound. We do, therefore, encourage all of our school community members to seriously consider getting their children vaccinated before the school year begins if at all possible. Vaccinations will also be available to our boarding students here in Salzburg after arrival and taking up official residency in the school dormitories in September.

## **VII. From Experience**

The school staff and administration gathered a great deal of experience last year in dealing with the pandemic and maintaining as full a program as possible. This experience should greatly aid us this coming school year and some of these lessons learned can and will be readily applied again if need be. Perhaps the most important lesson we learned was that as a full-boarding school with most of our students resident on campus, we were able to continue with personal, in-class instruction on a daily basis throughout the greater part of the school year, whereas the Austrian public schools were required to go online. We were even able to accommodate any of the day students who desired it, allowing them to fully participate as well.

## **VIII. Conclusion and Summary**

With this update, our intention is not to needlessly discourage or cast unfounded doubt upon the possibilities of a normal school year starting in September. We are all hopeful that this year will release our staff and students from most, if not all, of the debilitating conditions that were imposed upon us last year by the virus. We have warranted hope that with the increasing number of vaccinations in Austria and across the EU, the situation will ease further and further and the virus will lose much of its threat to everyone's health and welfare. This will, of course, take some time. One shouldn't have unrealistic expectations in this regard. Rather, a prudent, assertive and thoughtful consideration of the developments to date as well as careful consideration of possible future scenarios is required and justified.

*Quick Summary:*

1. The Corona virus pandemic remains somewhat unpredictable, but is coming under control with increasing numbers of vaccinations available in Austria and the EU. The situation is much improved.
2. The situation in Austria and Salzburg presently is very good and many restrictions have been lifted recently.
3. Some restrictions remain in place, the most important of which is the '3G' (vaccinated, recovered or tested) requirement for boarder crossings, restaurants, theaters, cafes, hairdressers, etc. This will likely remain in place through the fall.
4. The government may decide to upgrade the testing requirement within the '3G' requirements in the future to PCR tests only and at cost in an effort to urge more citizens to get vaccinated.
5. Proper precautions will be taken by AIS-Salzburg and the government officials regarding a safe and secure start to the school year including frequent testing during the first two weeks.
6. The number of vaccinations carried out by early September is likely not to reach a herd immunity level and, therefore, infections are predicted to rise through the coming months and at the start of the school year.
7. The Delta virus mutation has experts and officials concerned as it is more infectious than previous varieties. However, it seems that symptoms experienced by those who catch it are less likely to lead to hospitalization, granting the authorities justification to consider accepting higher infection numbers before instituting new restrictions.
8. If the '3G' regulations remain in place as at present, it may be that many of our resident students who are not vaccinated may be restricted from participation in some school activities and events including sports and athletics, excursions and outings, museum visits, etc. The school is therefore encouraging all students to get vaccinated to avoid such restrictions. Vaccinations can be done here in Salzburg upon arrival as well.
9. Our school staff has gained solid experience in dealing with this pandemic over the past year and will apply the knowledge learned to any eventual scenario this fall and throughout the 2021-2022 school year.
10. We expect a near-normal educational experience and programming for the coming school year. We do, however, want to be realistic and prudent in addressing any risks to our community.

The school administration will send regular updates concerning any and all aspects of this situation and try to keep our community as well-informed as possible through the coming weeks and months. We also encourage you to direct your questions to us at any time. Although many of the main questions will not be able to be answered with certainty, we will try our best to give you an objective appraisal of the situation and attendant risks to our community as a fundamental mandate.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Yours,



Paul McLean  
Headmaster