



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

August 4, 2021

Today, the Austrian Education Minister, Dr. Heinz Faßmann made an important preliminary announcement concerning the school year starting nationwide in September. His announcement details a strategy for September for all schools in Austria and are in response to predicted health threat conditions at that time. As a private school operating within the laws of Austria, AIS-Salzburg is bound to adhere to these measures completely. Therefore, these requirements provide an insight into conditions under which the new school year will begin for the AIS-Salzburg school community.

I. Introduction and Background Information

In an introductory statement, the Education Minister pointed out that the Corona situation in Austria remains volatile due to the increasing numbers of positive infections related to the Delta variation of the virus and that this increase can be expected to continue into the fall. The best predictions available suggest:

1. The number of positive infections is due to increase through August and September and the 7-day incidence rate (number of positive infections within a population of 100,000 over a seven-day period) is also expected to climb further. We are presently at 37.6, up from averages in the 20s two weeks ago. It is hoped that the 7-day incidence rate will not jump significantly this month and remain below the limit of 150.
2. Despite the slight rise in positive infections, hospitalizations remain very low and it appears that the Delta virus mutation, although much more contagious, does not lead as often to serious symptoms that require professional medical care. It is expected, therefore, that the Austrian authorities will consider this as a mitigating factor in determining what measures should be implemented this fall and not rely upon the 7-day incidence rate alone.
3. The Austrian government has a '3G' requirement in place presently, whereby everyone who wishes to visit a restaurant, cafe, theater, museum, indoor sports facility, hairdresser, bank, pharmacy or grocery store, must prove that they are either: (1st G) vaccinated, (2nd G) have a recent, negative test, or (3rd G) have recovered from Covid-19 with a physician's confirmation. We believe that this '3G' requirement will remain in place this fall at the start of the school year and possibly through the Christmas Break in December. Therefore, any of our students that are not vaccinated will need to get a recent negative test to enter such facilities.
4. AIS-Salzburg will continue to receive test materials (self-tests) and will implement these throughout the school community on a regular basis so long as this is required by the authorities. The school has official status to claim and confirm these test results for all students.
5. Austria's present vaccination rate is slowing down and is presently at near 60% of the total population. A level of safe, 'herd-immunity' would not be reached until this level reaches at least 80%. The government is offering free vaccinations to all residents in Austria and these will be available to AIS-Salzburg students from the age of 12 upwards upon confirmation of their residency

here at the school. The school administration will require confirmation and permission from parents and guardians before taking any student to be vaccinated.

II. A Four-Point System

In light of the above-mentioned predictions, the Austrian Education Ministry has communicated a four-point plan to be implemented this fall. This plan calls for the following measures applicable in all schools and educational institutions in Austria this September.

Point 1: An 'Early-Warning' System

This system will be implemented and directed by health experts at the Technical University Vienna and the University of Innsbruck and will include frequent testing of sewage water at water-purification facilities around the country. As these results give a 7-day warning before the breakout of positive infections, these authorities will warn all schools of a possible impending outbreak of infections.

Point 2: Regular Testing in Schools

Self-tests will continue to be distributed to all schools, including AIS-Salzburg. Tests will be required of all school personnel in the fall and at least through the start-up period of the school year. Testing will take place three times weekly. While the government had previously sent antigen self-tests only to schools, this fall, they will start sending self-PCR tests as well (a gurgle self-test) which is more reliable and accurate. The government has recommended that schools may allow students who are fully vaccinated not to take such tests, but AIS-Salzburg will require it of all students and staff in attendance in school programming. Finally, the authorities will maintain the allowance to have schools confirm a negative test result which will then meet the requirements of the '3G' regulations, allowing our students to fully participate in all programming which is indoor and off-campus.

Point 3: Vaccination Offer

The Education Ministry is organizing buses that will travel around Austria and visit all schools, offering free vaccinations to all students aged 12 and above. Again, the school administration at AIS-Salzburg will only allow such vaccinations if the parents or guardians submit written approval and permission for such actions. Vaccinations will remain available at various centers in and around Salzburg throughout the remainder of the year and appointments are available for all residents in Austria.

Point 4: Air Filtering Systems

The Austrian government will be offering air filtering devices for schools at reduced rates if required given local circumstances. AIS-Salzburg has already installed such air filtering systems on campus where required by the characteristics of the various rooms and facilities where our programming is held.

If you would like to view the official government communique, you can find it at this URL link (in German):
www.sichereschule.at

III. Conclusion and Summary

This information from the Education Ministry is generally positive and provides the community at AIS-Salzburg with some further, reliable information upon which we can plan for the start of the school year. I believe that this information is indicative of the perception we have that the Austrian government is quite opposed to closing schools unless absolutely necessary given health conditions. This Four-Point Plan seems to indicate that the government officials and health officials do not see such conditions on the horizon at present.

Secondly, this Four-Point Plan does not mention masking or distancing. It seems that officials are hoping that by other means, instruction in schools need not be compromised by such measures. We hope that this remains the case and that our students can enjoy the classroom environment and the pleasure of learning without such interference and disruption. Bear in mind, however, that masking and distancing requirements will remain in place on all public transport, taxis, in grocery stores, banks, pharmacies, hospitals and other health facilities.

Overall, the message from the government today is positive and meets our hopes that the coming school year will be much less affected by this ongoing pandemic.

The school administration will continue to 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul McLean', written in a cursive style.

Paul McLean
Headmaster