

Corona Update

March 19, 2022

Dear AIS-Salzburg Community Members;

In writing this latest update on the Corona situation here at AIS-Salzburg, in the city, and nation-wide in Austria, I am somewhat at a loss for words. I don't think that anyone—experts or amateurs—thought that the highest infection rates ever recorded in Austria since the first Covid-19 infections were reported here back in January, 2020, would confound the country as it has these past few weeks.

Here are the somewhat overwhelming numbers recently recorded by the health agencies active here in Austria and in Salzburg Province:

I. Present situation in Austria and Salzburg

1. Positive infections nationwide per day

		<i>7-Day Incidence Rate</i>
Friday, March 18, 2022:	40,378	3,597.7
Thursday, March 17, 2022:	51,291	3,637.6
Wednesday, March 16, 2022:	52,268	3,622.6
Tuesday, March 15, 2022:	64,306	3,602.4
Monday, March 14, 2022:	40,472	3,460.8

2. Positive infections in Salzburg Province per day

		<i>7-Day Incidence Rate</i>
Friday, March 18, 2022:	1,921	3,508.1
Thursday, March 17, 2022:	3,552	3,637.4
Wednesday, March 16, 2022:	3,579	3,596.5
Tuesday, March 15, 2022:	4,230	3,481.7
Monday, March 14, 2022:	2,059	3,389.3

3. Hospitalizations nationwide

ICU Patients hospitalized with Covid-19	208 (10% of available beds)
ICU Patients hospitalized without Covid-19	1,188 (56% of available beds)

4. Hospitalizations in Salzburg Province

ICU Patients hospitalized with Covid-19	5 (4% of available beds)
ICU Patients hospitalized without Covid-19	99 (74% of available beds)

II. An Attempt at an Explanation

The reason for this rapid and unexpected rise in Covid-19 infections in Austria seems to be closely related to two factors: the very infectious nature of the Omicron BA.2 variation of the SARS-CoV-2 virus as well as the ending of nearly all health-risk requirements and regulations

earlier this month. As of March 5, 2022, you will recall that the Austrian government decided to relax nearly all restrictions in place except for FFP-2 masking in public transport, grocery stores and gas stations, pharmacies, doctors' offices, and retirement homes. Restaurants, bars, discos, hotels and other meeting places were immediately filled to the brim with eager customers who had been prohibited from enjoying themselves at such venues for a significant period of time. The masking rules were dropped completely both indoors and out in all but the above-mentioned locations.

At the same time, the BA.2 variation of the Omicron mutation, made its entry into Austria and found a situation very advantageous for its spread. As numbers of infections grew rapidly, the government felt it necessary to reassure the public that a rise was expected at any rate due to the ending of restrictions.

As of this week, however, more and more health officials, virologists and some politicians have begun blaming the Austrian government for having created a situation which is now starting to threaten the health system—not necessarily because of hospitalizations due to infections (see above), but because more and more hospital staff members were being infected, quarantined for between five and ten days and unable to work. This, at present is the primary threat to the health-care system's ability to maintain professional services as required.

This past week, March 13-19, 2022, saw infections explode to over 60,000 infections in one day (Tuesday, March 14). This level of rise was completely unexpected and the criticism of the government has grown proportionally.

Yesterday, March 18th, the new Health Minister announced that FFP-2 masking is required, for the time being, in all indoor areas at all times. It is hoped that this measure will help bring the infection rates down somewhat and help hospitals, schools and businesses continue operating without being threatened by the loss of employees who are quarantined. Further restrictions are not anticipated at this time.

III. In Austrian Schools

The Austrian public schools were allowed to develop their own, specific requirements to protect the health of pupils and staff throughout the past two years, provided these included any and all general requirements passed by the Austrian parliament. As of March 7th, students and teachers that have been vaccinated were allowed to stop wearing masks during instruction in the classrooms, but FFP-2 masking continued in all indoor common areas of schools. Additionally, antigen testing continued 3x per week and PCR testing, twice weekly.

Despite these measures, the latest wave of infections has spread through the public schools at a similar rate to that within the general public; closing many classes and sending many students and staff members into isolation and quarantine for 5-to-7 days.

IV. At AIS-Salzburg

As you may recall, I reported that eight students had been infected with the Omicron variant as of March 7th and that although the government's requirements for schools were lessened, we would go back to full masking during the academic day with mask breaks, ventilation, etc., that we would carry out antigen tests daily during school days and weekends and that we would continue to comply with PCR testing twice weekly. Additionally, the AIS-Salzburg administration re-

instituted online/hybrid learning in all classes, postponed the Winter Trimester Awards Dinner, gave day student parents the option of having their children at home and online rather than physically in the classrooms, and provided off-campus accommodations for those boarders and staff members that were positive.

These measures remain in place presently and, unfortunately, we have had regular and constant new infections on a daily basis throughout the past 10 days. At present, five boarding students are in quarantine at the 'Corona Schloss' down the street and two staff members, Ms. Fox and Mr. Fox, are also presently infected with Covid-19. As has been the case for nearly all those who have been positively infected, the symptoms are relatively mild with a few students being bed-ridden for a day or two with low-grade fever and nose, throat and chest congestion.

Hybrid instruction and the allowance for students to remain at home will continue through this next week. When infections are down significantly among the public, the administration will again require the presence of all students in the classrooms. The earliest these changes will occur is following our return from the excursions to Prague and Athens on the 27th of March.

IV. Upcoming Events/Excursions and Infections

Since the minimum period of quarantine, at present, is five days, any students or staff members who catch the virus this weekend or this coming week will, unfortunately, not be able to join us on the excursions to Prague and Athens from Friday, March 25th through Tuesday, the 29th. The school will provide continuous care and supervision for any boarding students who need to remain in quarantine over this period.

In the meantime, we are doing our best to provide minimum coverage of all classes and evening/ weekend supervision and hoping that further infections do not compromise our ability to deliver the curriculum or provide sufficient care and guidance after hours. There have been a number of teachers and resident-care staff members who were feeling ill in the past 10 days, but these never developed into positive Covid-19 infections and seem to be the result of an increased spread of flu-like viruses common in most winters and/or common head colds.

V. Conclusions

With the (postponed) Fall Excursion coming up in one week, Spring Break just around the corner (April 9-24) and the end of year hectic about to begin shortly thereafter, all of us here at the school are hoping for relief from this present Covid-19 wave. It is quite enough to do to stay on top of the regular programming without the contribution of a number of key personnel, but when a worldwide crisis (Ukraine) and a Covid wave of these enormous proportions hits us as well, we truly have our hands full. Still, the staff members are very dedicated educators and we will all do our best to meet our mission fully in the coming weeks and continue to hope that the advent of warm, spring weather as well as a natural decline in hosts available to the Omicron BA.2 variant will bring relief by Easter at the latest.

We thank you for your continued support and assistance.

Yours,



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