

Austria Scraps Mandatory COVID-19 Vaccination Law

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Austria is suspending a law that made COVID-19 vaccination mandatory for all adults in the country. The move comes as multiple European nations have dropped COVID-related restrictions and mandates in recent weeks. Austria was one of the only countries in the world to make COVID-19 vaccination mandatory.

The law took effect in February and called for fines up to €3,600 from mid-March for those who did not comply. Under the government’s plan, police officers would have checked for vaccination status at traffic stops. Citizens would have been required to produce proof of vaccination in writing or be subjected to fines.

Enforcement never ramped up for the law, however. Minister Karoline Edtstadler ultimately announced an end to the legislation on Wednesday, just a little over a month after it took effect. Edtstadler said the law’s “encroachment of fundamental rights” could no longer be justified by the pandemic. After consultations with the health minister, we have decided that we will of course follow what the (expert) commission has said,” Edtstadler told reporters after a Cabinet meeting.

The Austrian government may reinstate the law if cases and hospitalizations trend back up, officials said. Health Minister Johannes Rauch said a commission of health experts will deliver another report within three months, at which point the government will review the situation again. “I don’t think I need a crystal ball to tell you that today isn’t the last chapter we will write regarding the vaccination mandate,” Edtstadler said.

Austria, along with most of Europe and the U.S., has reported a dramatic drop in both COVID cases and hospitalizations in recent weeks. The alpine nation had already dropped most of its COVID-related restrictions effective last Saturday. Proof of vaccination is no longer required for entry to several venues in the nation, though a handful of mask requirements remain. Calls for the vaccination law to be suspended increased after the general COVID restrictions were dropped.

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