

22 March 2020

State government enacts comprehensive ban on contact and other measures to slow coronavirus pandemic

No more than two people together in public / Non-adherence: fines up to 25,000 euros and custodial sentences possible / Minister-President Laschet: We are not monitoring the reasonable, but punishing the unreasonable

The state government has passed an extensive contact ban for North Rhine-Westphalia that will come into effect on Monday (23 March 2020). This will prohibit public gatherings and meetings of more than two people.

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

According to the state chancellery:

By legal decree the state government has passed an extensive contact ban for North Rhine-Westphalia that will come into effect on Monday (23 March 2020). This will prohibit public gatherings and meetings of more than two people. This excludes immediate relatives, spouses, life partners and people living together; accompaniment for minors and persons requiring assistance; urgently required meetings for social, professional, service, examination- and care-related reasons. Usage of public transit remains permitted.

[Legal ordinance to protect against the coronavirus / prohibition on contact](#)

Says Minister-President Armin Laschet, "North Rhine-Westphalia is one of the first states to experience a massive plummet in public life due to the coronavirus. This was the right choice and we will stand by it, and will tighten measures in this regard. While the majority of residents have acknowledged that this is a matter of life and death, we continue to see excessive unreasonable behaviour. There are still people who disregard the rules and recommendations, and act as dangerously as they are able. We will not tolerate this. It is for that reason that we are enacting a comprehensive prohibition on contact. As of midnight on Monday, public gatherings and meetings of more than two people will be prohibited. With this new decree we are not monitoring the reasonable, but rather punishing the unreasonable. We will do so consistently and harshly. It is good that the federal and state governments were able to agree on this joint, unified approach."

The respective local authorities are responsible for actively and consistently enforcing the decree, with force when necessary. They will be aided by the police. Violations will be prosecuted as administrative offences with a fine of up to 25,000 euros, and as criminal offences with custodial sentences of up to five years. The respective authorities are ordered to set minimum fines of 200 euros.

Along with the comprehensive, individual ban on contact, the state government has passed further restrictions as well. Here is an overview of some of the major changes:

Inpatient health and care facilities

Visits not required for purposes of medical treatment or care, or not required by law, are prohibited. Facility management shall allow exceptions pending protective measures and instruction in hygiene if medically or ethically-socially appropriate (e.g. maternity and children's wards, palliative patients).

Skilled trades, service industry

Skilled workers and service industry personnel may continue working with precautions to protect against infection.

Opticians, audiologists, orthopaedic shoemakers and other skilled workers with business premises are prohibited from selling goods unrelated to their specific trade from said premises; this excludes necessary equipment. Services for which a minimum distance of 1.5 metres between two people cannot be adhered to (in particular salons, nail studios, tattoo studios, massage parlours) are prohibited. The practising of therapeutic professions, in particular physical and occupational therapy, remains permitted provided the necessity of the treatment has been verified via a doctor's attestation and strict protective measures against infection are taken.

Trade

Building supply stores and garden stores may remain open to provide for tradespeople and skilled labourers. Other persons may only enter if suitable measures against infection have been taken (in particular to ensure minimum distances between people and safety precautions for till staff). Florists may also continue to operate under these requirements.

Food service

Restaurants, inns, takeaways, cafeterias, canteens and other food service facilities are prohibited from operating.

Delivery of food and drinks, as well as off-trade sales, are permitted if the distances required to protect against infection are adhered to. Consumption within 50 metres of the food service facility is prohibited.

Events, gatherings, religious services, funerals

Events and gatherings are prohibited. This excludes events intended to maintain public safety and order, or to provide relief and public services (in particular blood donation appointments). Religious gatherings will be suspended: churches, Islamic associations and Jewish associations have issued their own declarations.

Burials and cremations, as well as prayers for the deceased, are permitted with direct relatives and close friends.

Libraries

Libraries, including those at universities, must limit access to their services and only allow admission under strict protective requirements (in particular visitor registration with contact information, regulation of visitor numbers, requirements for minimum distances of 2 metres between reading and work areas, hygiene measures, posters with information on proper hygiene measures).

The ordinance takes effect on 12:00 midnight on Monday, 23 March 2020.