

FAQs regarding the Coronavirus Protection Ordinance effective 22 February 2021

Which contact restrictions still apply?

The following contact restrictions apply until 7 March 2021:

Meetings in public spaces are only permitted between members of the same household and one additional person. This person may be accompanied by children from their household who require supervision; a parent who lives separately from the children but has custody rights may also be accompanied by the children.

The previous exceptions to the minimum social distance requirement remain largely unchanged and can be found in § 2 para. 2 of the Coronavirus Protection Ordinance. These exceptions apply, among other cases, to children playing on a playground, the use of public transport provided medical masks are worn, and the accompaniment or supervision of minors or other persons who require care.

The use of volunteer or community transport services, for example on the way to and from vaccination centres, also constitutes an exception for the purpose of the Coronavirus Protection Ordinance.

What are the current mask requirements?

It is still compulsory to wear a medical mask in certain places. Medical masks are defined by the Coronavirus Protection Ordinance as surgical masks that comply with the EN 14683 standard (must be indicated on the packaging) and masks that comply with the KN95/N95 or FFP2 standards or higher – but in each case without an exhalation valve. The obligation to wear a medical mask applies regardless of adherence to the minimum social distance:

- in retail establishments, pharmacies, petrol stations, banks, etc., as well as in doctors' surgeries and similar medical facilities,
- on public transport, including at stations and stops,
- when using volunteer or community transport services, for example on the way to and from vaccination centres,
- during authorised classroom education or training and examinations in accordance with § 6 and 7 of the Coronavirus Protection Ordinance,
- during religious services and other religious gatherings, including while seated.

A medical mask must also be worn by those rendering or using hairdressing services, which will be permissible from 1 March 2021.

According to federal law (SARS-CoV-2 Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance of the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, dated 21 January 2021), a medical mask must also be worn in the workplace whenever a safe distance of 1.5 metres is not maintained. In this case, the employer is responsible for providing medical masks for the employees.

The mask requirement also remains in effect for the following areas, where a cloth mask is however sufficient:

- in enclosed public spaces, provided these are accessible to customers and visitors – with or without admission control,
- at markets and similar outdoor sales areas,
- on the grounds of retail establishments and their parking lots and access pathways within a distance of ten metres from the store entrance.

What is the mask requirement for children?

Children younger than school age remain exempt from the mask requirement. If a medical mask does not fit properly on children under 14 years of age, a cloth mask is sufficient even in places where a medical mask is otherwise required.

What are the mask requirements for child day care and at schools?

- Children are generally required to wear a medical mask at school, but cloth masks are acceptable up to grade 8 for children for whom medical masks do not (yet) fit.
- At day care, the mask requirement (calling for a medical mask) applies only to adults, and only if they cannot maintain the minimum required distance from each other (i.e., between adults). This rule also applies to parents when dropping off or picking up their children.

When will hairdressers and non-medical foot care services be allowed to reopen? What are the rules for other services?

As of 1 March 2021, foot care and hairdressing services may once again be offered and used. Given the importance of personal hygiene, older people in particular are in urgent need of these services after such a long hiatus. Facilities offering other non-medical personal care services, such as cosmetic, nail and tattoo studios, will remain closed until 7 March 2021, as the reason for the special exemption cited above does not apply.

What legal regulations apply to food service and overnight accommodation?

Restaurants and public houses will remain closed, as will canteens and dining halls as a matter of principle.

Only delivery and pick-up are permitted. Company canteens and dining halls at educational institutions may stay open to serve the staff and users of the educational institutions if their closure would prevent the continued work processes and permissible educational services.

Overnight accommodation for private purposes is still prohibited. Overnight accommodation for business/official purposes is exempt from this restriction.

Are retail stores closed?

Yes. Retail stores will remain closed until 7 March 2021. Exceptions are: grocery stores, delivery and pick-up services, beverage markets, farmers' markets, pharmacies, health food stores, medical supply stores, baby products stores, chemists, petrol stations, banks, credit unions, post offices, kiosks and newspaper stands, feed stores and pet supply stores, wholesale (for wholesale customers only), and the serving of food by social facilities (e.g. food banks).

Are DIY stores and garden centres allowed to open?

DIY stores and garden centres are still only allowed to serve businesses. An exception is made for the sale of cut flowers and perishable potted plants as well as for vegetable plants and seed (seeds, bulbs, seed potatoes, etc.). These products including accessories may also be sold by DIY stores and garden centres to private individuals. However, DIY stores and garden centres must limit their sales to private individuals exclusively to these products and may not sell any other product lines.

What are the rules for the sale of flowers, vegetable plants and seeds?

Retail outlets selling perishable cut flowers and potted plants and closely related accessories (planters and so on) have already been permitted to open. As of 22 February 2021, these stores will also be allowed to sell vegetable plants and seed.

Are mail-order business and customer pick-up of goods permitted?

Yes. Mail-order business and delivery of ordered goods are still permitted. Customer pick-up of ordered goods is only permitted if it can be done without contact and in compliance with anti-infection measures.

Under what circumstances is music instruction possible?

As of 22 February 2021, one-on-one music lessons for children up to and including primary school age are again permitted.

Classroom music lessons are also permitted if they are integrated into child day care or primary school teaching, or if they are offered in cooperation with these facilities exclusively for the fixed group of children attending a school or day care centre. Such lessons should be held in the largest possible rooms while taking advantage of opportunities for hybrid or alternating lessons.

What applies to education and training offerings?

All further education and training courses are prohibited, including compensatory basic education offerings as well as integration courses and also all related examinations, for example at adult education centres and private institutions for continuing education as well as self-help offerings.

Exempt from this prohibition are:

- individual lessons or other individual training outside closed rooms,
- classroom instruction for final-year students obtaining state-recognised school-leaving certificates through “second chance” education,
- classroom instruction for graduating classes in preparation for a vocational qualification,

- in-person vocational and school-leaving examinations and integration examinations as well as preparatory measures for these exams if they cannot be postponed for legal or factual reasons or if postponement would place an unacceptable burden on the examinees,
- publicly sponsored extracurricular education for pupils offered by schools within the meaning of § 1 of the Coronavirus Care Ordinance, provided that the offerings are made on the basis of the guidelines for the promotion of extracurricular educational and care services designed to reduce disadvantages brought about by the coronavirus pandemic.

For these exceptions, the social distancing and safety precautions must be strictly observed. In addition, such instruction should be held in the largest possible rooms while also taking advantage of opportunities for hybrid or alternating lessons.

Will universities and extracurricular public service educational facilities remain open?

Instruction and examination at universities and medical schools are permitted in compliance with the requirements of the Law on the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases. Lectures may only be held in the classroom if the students would otherwise be seriously disadvantaged or if they cannot be postponed.

Classroom examinations and preparation are only permitted if they cannot be postponed for compelling reasons or if postponement would place an unreasonable burden on the students. Internal teaching events including the associated examinations within the framework of preparatory services and initial, continuing or further vocational training at universities, schools, institutes and similar establishments for such training in the public service, as well as at courts and public authorities, are in principle not permitted in person. This does not apply to classroom instruction for final-year students or, in the case of non-multi-year courses, students in the last stage of training before the final exam or career development exam. The largest possible rooms should be used.

Are companies required to allow employees to work from home?

The Federal Ministry of Labour has passed an ordinance (SARS-CoV-2 Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance of the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, dated 21 January 2021) stipulating that employers must allow employees to work from home whenever possible. The aim is to reduce physical contact in the workplace and during the commute. The ordinance will enter into force in the near future.

What rules apply to recreational and amateur sports?

Recreational and amateur sports are generally prohibited on and in all public and private sports facilities, gyms, swimming pools and similar establishments.

However, as of 22 February 2021, it will again be permitted to do sports alone, in pairs or exclusively with persons from one's own household on outdoor sports grounds, including one-on-one sports training. This applies, for example, to sports fields, athletics facilities, outdoor tennis courts and golf courses. A minimum distance of five metres must be

maintained at all times between the various persons or groups of persons who may be simultaneously playing sports in open-air sports facilities.
The use of common areas, including changing rooms and showers, is not permitted.

Jogging, walking, and other outdoor sports outside of athletic facilities continue to be permitted as long as contact restrictions are observed.

What are the current rules for cultural institutions?

Concerts and performances in theatres, opera houses, concert halls, cinemas and other public or private (cultural) institutions are prohibited until 7 March 2021. The same applies to the operation of museums, art exhibitions, galleries, castles and palaces, memorials and similar venues. Only drive-in theatres that maintain a distance of 1.5 meters between vehicles are allowed to operate.

What rules apply to professional musicians?

Rehearsals required for professional practice are still allowed. Professional musicians are also permitted to hold concerts and performances without an audience for recording or broadcast on the radio or internet.

What are the current rules for recreational facilities and entertainment venues?

The following are prohibited from operating until 7 March 2021:

- swimming and splash pools, tanning salons, saunas, spas and similar facilities,
- zoos, animal parks, amusement parks, indoor playgrounds and similar recreational facilities (indoor and outdoor),
- gambling halls, casinos and similar establishments
- clubs, discotheques and similar establishments,
- brothels, places of prostitution and similar establishments,
- excursions via boat, horse-drawn carriage, historical trains and similar modes of transport.

Bookies and betting offices are permitted only to accept tickets, bets, etc. Visitors are prohibited from spending any further time in these establishments (e.g., to follow the games and events on which bets have been placed).

Are events and gatherings still allowed?

Events and gatherings not covered by special provisions of the Coronavirus Protection Ordinance are prohibited until 7 March 2021.

The following, among others, are still permitted, provided the stipulated requirements are met in each case:

- assemblies pursuant to the Public Meetings Act (e.g., demonstrations)

- events that serve to provide basic services to the population, uphold public safety and order, or provide for the public welfare (e.g., party assemblies to determine electoral district candidates, blood donations, etc.).
- meetings of legally appointed local self-government bodies
- meetings of legally appointed bodies, societies, parties, associations or homeowners' associations that cannot be held digitally
- funerals
- civil weddings