

COVID-19: Council updates recommendation on free movement restrictions

The Council today adopted a recommendation amending the recommendation on a coordinated approach to the restriction of free movement in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This update responds to the evolving epidemiological situation, the ongoing vaccination campaigns and the adoption of the EU digital COVID certificate.

Free movement restrictions

Member states should continue to strongly discourage all non-essential travel to and from **dark red** areas. This should also be the case for areas with a **high prevalence of COVID-19 variants of concern or interest** and for areas with unknown prevalence due to insufficient sequencing. People travelling from these areas should still be required to be in possession of a negative test certificate and to quarantine/self-isolate.

Member states could continue to require people travelling from **an orange or red area** to be in possession of a negative test certificate. If they do not hold such a certificate, people travelling from a red area could be required to quarantine/self-isolate until they obtain a negative test result and people travelling from an orange area could be required to undergo testing after arrival.

Children under the age of 12 should be exempted from the requirement to undergo tests.

Vaccinated and recovered persons

Holders of vaccination certificates issued in line with the EU digital COVID certificate regulation should not be subject to testing or quarantine/self isolation if they are fully vaccinated with an EMA approved vaccine and at least 14 days have passed since full vaccination. Member states could also lift such restrictions after the first dose of a two-dose series.

Recovered persons holding a certificate indicating that less than 180 days have passed since the date of a positive test result should not be subject to testing or quarantine/self isolation.

Minors should not be required to quarantine/self-isolate if the person accompanying them is not required to, for example because they are vaccinated or recovered persons.

Common criteria and mapping

The updated recommendation includes two additional criteria to be taken into account when considering whether to restrict free movement: the vaccination update and the prevalence of COVID-19 variants of concern or interest.

It also raises the thresholds for including an area in one of the four defined colours:

- **green**: if the 14-day notification rate is less than 50 and the test positivity rate below 4%, or if the 14-day notification rate is less than 75 and the test positivity rate less than 1%
- **orange**: if the 14-day notification rate is less than 50 and the test positivity rate is 4% or more; if the 14-day notification rate is between 50 and 75 and the test positivity rate is 1% or more; or if the 14-day notification rate is between 75 and 200 and the test positivity rate is less than 4%
- **red**: if the 14-day notification rate is between 75 and 200 and the test positivity rate is 4% or more; or if the 14-day notification rate is between 200 and 500
- **dark red**: the threshold for this colour is maintained at a notification rate of more than 500

Emergency brake

Where the epidemiological situation in a region deteriorates rapidly, in particular due to a high prevalence of variants of concern or interest, member states could trigger an emergency brake. On that basis, member states should also require vaccinated and recovered persons to undergo testing and/or quarantine/self-isolate.

The Council, in close cooperation with the Commission and supported by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, should review the situation in a coordinated manner.

Background

The decision on whether to introduce restrictions on free movement to protect public health remains the responsibility of member states; however, coordination on this topic is essential. On 13 October 2020, the Council adopted a recommendation on a coordinated approach to the restriction of free movement in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which was updated on 1 February 2021. This recommendation establishes common criteria and a common framework for possible measures for travellers.

The Council recommendation is not a legally binding instrument. The authorities of the member states remain responsible for implementing the content of the recommendation.

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