

## **Overview of Covid-19 measures taken by the City of Vienna**

*As of May 20th, 2020*

### **Cautious exit, inclusive recovery**

As Austria's government continues the relief of Covid-19 measures, businesses, restaurants, schools and childcare facilities, services and spaces in the cities and regions of the country re-open again step-by-step. The city of Vienna has decided to go for a cautious and inclusive exit and recovery strategy, accompanied by **increased testing of staff** in critical infrastructure, schools as well as child care facilities, and **rapid detection of new infection spots**. However, this is **overshadowed by political debates** that are due to upcoming municipal elections, leading contradictory statements by different members of the national government about Vienna's capacity to manage recovery. While the Minister of Health reports excellent cooperation with Vienna and a good handling of the crisis, the Minister of the Interior repeatedly accuses the city of being reluctant to share information and to work together with the police. **Mayor Michael Ludwig** has shown irritation and rejected criticisms: "Contradictory statements on the management of the Covid-19 situation unsettle our citizens. This is exactly what cannot be allowed to happen now. It is important to bring the country through this difficult time with calm and deliberation."

**One big hotspot for infections** has been detected and followed up fast, with first cases found in a **home for refugees** in April. However, contact tracing showed clear indication that a **mail distribution centre** in Hagenbrunn, a small town in Lower Austria, or the **contract employment** agencies were the triggers. Only ten percent of those affected in Vienna apparently showed symptoms. On Sunday, Vienna **City Councillor for Health, Peter Hacker**, presented a first analysis of the current cluster of coronavirus infections: "A close examination of the latest figures showed that many of the workers working in the mail distribution centre live in Vienna. Contract work is apparently a big problem in this context. This had nothing to do with refugees. Most of the cases, for example in the home for refugees in Vienna, could be traced back to the postal distribution centres - and not vice versa." Hacker explained that the **city changed its testing strategy to target larger facilities at an early stage** instead of waiting for an infection being reported. In this context, he sees the issue of **contract work as a more serious problem**: "People don't go on sick leave because then they don't get any more money. They don't call in when they are sick. So it's fatal if they're together in the company bus or in the staff room," said Peter Hacker. Vienna will therefore take a closer look at the topic of contract work and precarious employment in Vienna.

### **Current key figures from Vienna**

As of May 20<sup>th</sup> there are 3.020 confirmed cases of the disease in Vienna, 2.405 people have recovered. 144 people died due to Covid-19; since more than one week, no new fatalities due to Covid-19 have been reported. Around 50.000 people in Vienna lost jobs and currently, 270,000 Viennese are registered for short-time work. Most affected sectors are tourism,

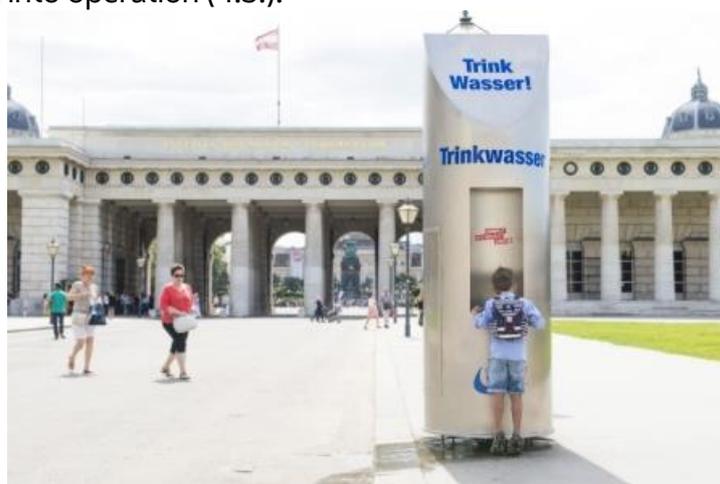
catering, trade and construction. The increase in unemployment among young people is above average, leading city government to develop more support in this field.

### Health and social care

- The social affairs department ensured its services to its 133,000 users during the crisis by extending the duration of expiring social benefits; an automatic procedure and postponed controls were set up, allowing everyone in need to get their social allowances and stay financially stable. Communication in the main languages of Vienna 's diverse population reached out to all concerned citizens (12.5.).
- Recent data analysis of Vienna 's department for statistics shows that there is no excess mortality rate in Vienna; the mortality rate has stayed in a normal range (11.5.).
- Vienna Hospitals: Giving birth under normal circumstances is possible; there is no need to wear a facemask (9.5.).
- City of Vienna accelerates corona tests: tests of teachers and healthcare sector workers are increased (8.5.).
- Relaxed rules for visiting nursing homes: From May 4<sup>th</sup>, visiting family members and friends in residential homes and nursing homes is allowed again, guidelines are established to control the visits (29.4.).
- Vienna Hospitals: Cancer patients get unrestricted treatments under safe conditions (27.4.).
- 24h-caregivers, mainly women from countries as Rumania, Slovakia and Hungary, who had to extend their stay receive a bonus of 500 Euros (27.4.).

### Public services: energy, water, waste and transport

- In time with the rising temperatures, Vienna's drinking fountains will be turned up again from 4 May. The commissioning of all fountains will take a few days. Then free spring water will flow out of about 1,000 drinking fountains from the mountains. People are asked not drink directly from the drinking fountains, but to fill a bottle they have brought with them. The 55 monumental and memorial fountains will also be put back into operation (4.5.).



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Vienna is well-known for its excellent water quality: now, the 1000 drinking fountains are operational again. They can be found on an interactive website:

<https://www.wien.gv.at/stadtplan-mobil/#zoom=14&lat=48.20602&lon=16.37709&layer=trinkbrunnen&base=karte>

- Normal intervals for public underground have started on May 11<sup>th</sup> and on May 18<sup>th</sup>, for busses and trams (4.5.).
- Student semester tickets for the "Wiener Linien", public transport, are valid until September 30<sup>th</sup> (3.5.).
- Vienna 's first pop-up bike lane opened on Praterstraße in the second district; as it used a former lane of cars, this led to a lot of discussions (7.5.).
- The short-term parking zone regulation is on force again from April 27<sup>th</sup>; also for parking garages, the normal rates will be valid again (24.4.).

### Helping the economy and people to keep jobs

- Gastro vouchers for Vienna 's citizens: In order to support the Viennese gastronomy up to 50 Euros will be given to every household. In total, the City of Vienna provides 40 million Euros for this campaign to help and support the Viennese gastronomy. The citizens can redeem these vouchers for food and non-alcoholic beverages (13.5.).
- The Vienna Employment Promotion Fund (waff) is the City of Vienna's labour market organization. It is currently urgently seeking applicants who wish to start training to become home care, nursing assistants and social workers, all careers leading to safe jobs (13.5.).
- Vienna companies can apply for tax relief for Vienna provincial and municipal taxes. Among other things, deferrals or instalment payments are possible upon request; there will be no surcharges for late payment, interest on deferral and late payment penalties, as decided by the legislative assembly of the city on April 30<sup>th</sup> (30.4.).
- The guarantee scheme for companies was doubled - the aid package for bridging loans was increased to 20 million Euros (26.4.).

### Housing and homelessness

- Vienna 's 1<sup>st</sup> Municipal Housing Choir (1. Wiener Gemeindebau-Chor) invites to sing along since April 15<sup>th</sup>. Instructions are published weekly for download on <https://wohnpartner-wien.at/aktuelles/detail/1-wiener-gemeindebau-chor-laedt-zum-mitsingen-ein> and on the YouTube channel "wohnpartner wien", so that a new song can be rehearsed every week. Participating is very easy: listen to the instructions, open or print out the sheet music and you can sing along. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NKRHu9\\_MB-w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NKRHu9_MB-w)



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## Education, arts and culture

- Schools in Vienna open in 3 stages: on May 4<sup>th</sup>, school-leavers about to graduate, as well as for apprentices in their final year return to school. As of May 18<sup>th</sup>, children up to 14 years of age, i.e. all classes of primary schools, new secondary schools, lower secondary schools, special schools and all German language classes start again. From June 3<sup>rd</sup>, school students of the higher school levels, return. Classes are divided into 2 groups of about 11 children each, unless the class is already small enough. These groups are taught in their classrooms, but alternately in shifts. There will be no cross-class lessons or project work. If possible, it is recommended that classes start at staggered intervals. This will result in different break times and class ends. Although the information from the **national government came on a very short notice**, the city had very quickly ordered around 100,000 masks for kindergartens and schools as well as 30,000 children's masks, disinfectants, etc. **(3.5.)**.
- Phased plan for child care facilities: Starting from May 4<sup>th</sup>, kindergartens are gradually opened again for children under certain circumstances (23.4.).
- Music schools open again: Lessons with physical presence start again on May 18<sup>th</sup>, initially only one-to-one lessons are possible (13.5.).
- Libraries open again from May 18<sup>th</sup>: For the moment only borrowing and returning books is possible, there are renewal offers for new customers of the Viennese libraries (11.5.).

## Communication, citizen engagement and neighbourhood initiatives

- At the **first children's press conference on corona** in the Vienna City Hall on May 14<sup>th</sup>, the focus was on questions from children. In the city hall 's huge ballroom, where the press conferences of the city government take place usually now, Mayor Michael Ludwig and City Councillor Juergen Czernohorszky, responsible for children and youth, answered the questions of young citizens between 4 and 10 years of age sent in previously by video (14.5).
- The city undertook an **online survey with more than 1.000 citizens** aged 16 and over, which showed great satisfaction with the services provided by Vienna in the context of the corona pandemic. The way the City of Vienna is dealing with the current situation was assessed positively:
  - 43,4 % are of the opinion that Vienna handles the current situation and the measures "much better" or "somewhat better" than the rest of Austria. 41,6% conceded "equally good handling".
  - 59,8 % are "very or rather satisfied" with the crisis communication/information provided by the city, while 16,2% are "less satisfied or not satisfied at all". 69,1 % of the respondents feel sufficiently informed, almost a third of all respondents give the best value "yes, definitely".
  - The information prepared by the City of Vienna in the various media channels is rated by 77,0 % as "very useful or useful", by 74,2 % as "very comprehensive or comprehensive" and by 73,1% as "very credible or credible".
  - 66,7 % are "very or rather satisfied" with the crisis management of the City of Vienna. 79,4 % also trust that Vienna will master the Corona crisis and 50 % are of the opinion that the current situation will strengthen social cohesion in Vienna.

### **More room outdoors**

- Open child and youth work starts again: "wienXtra", the organization for all children and young people in Vienna, offers a range of services, as festivals, concerts, movies, games and media – und this invites young citizens to join and shape the city. Ten facilities offer lots of information, events, educational services and advice as well as adult education programmes– at low cost or free of charges. As of May 15<sup>th</sup> there will be a focus on public space and wienXtra initiatives re-opened (7.5.).

### **Administration**

- As of 15<sup>th</sup> May, the city administration gradually increases its normal contacts with customers. "Face-to-face" are only provided after prior appointment reservation. Appointments can be made online via a newly set up online appointment calendar, by phone or e-mail directly with the responsible office.
- Clear rules have been established to protect both customers and staff from risks; as keeping a distance of 1 m between all persons and following general hygiene measures (such as washing hands). Where a 1 m distance between employees can be maintained, no mask is required. If possible, work procedures are planned to ensure that the number of staff working simultaneously in one place is kept to a minimum.

### **Urban life after corona**

Mayor Michael Ludwig, who is also the President of the Austrian Association of Cities and Towns has stated at several occasions that it will be vital ensuring that cities benefit from aid and investment programmes at both national and European level. Vienna as Austria's biggest economic powerhouse is securing and creating jobs. In order to keep it that way, the city will need financial assistance and more room to manoeuvre, particularly as many revenues such as municipal taxes are collapsing or even disappearing completely. Mayor Ludwig therefore calls on the federal government to safeguard the cities and municipalities' finances. He also addresses the planned EU recovery package with the clear demand that this needs to be applied to cities and municipalities, as their investments directly benefit small and medium-sized enterprises. Towns and municipalities are the most important public investors in Austria.

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