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## How We Enable Openings without Triggering a Third Coronavirus Wave

No-Covid does not mean that lockdown measures will be endlessly extended or even tightened until the virus disappears.

Coronavirus crisis management in Germany, as in other Continental European countries, has reached a dead end. Hotels, restaurants, retail outlets, and cultural operators can barely hold on any longer, despite aid. School closures are putting a strain on families and damaging a generation of young people whose future prospects are dimming. At the same time, the number of recorded infections is no longer falling as more contagious viral mutants spread. Vaccination progress is slow. In this situation, easing the restrictions without further precautions will trigger a third wave of infections. The economy would not be helped. Many a business would not even open, many customers would stay at home for fear of infection, and the next lockdown would come quickly. Schools would also have to close again.

### Two-Pillar Strategy: More Testing and Localized Reopening

The way out of this impasse lies in a strategy with two pillars: first, a fundamental change in the strategy of testing and tracking and isolating cases of infection; and second, tying initially localized openings to this testing strategy. There needs to be significantly more testing, we need to use more data on testing and infection cases, and we need to ensure that infected people are quarantined more quickly.

This has two key advantages. First, increased testing immediately enables locally defined openings. Many companies already test their workforces on a regular basis, enabling safe working and effectively easing coronavirus restrictions within their factory gates. Allowing students and teachers to take a quick test before entering the school allows for face-to-face instruction. The same applies to shopping malls or entire pedestrian zones and the stores there.

The second benefit of massively scaling up testing and using the data collected in the process is that infections will be detected earlier and their local origin identified. Recent epidemiological studies show that faster detection and isolation of infected individuals can dramatically reduce the spread of the virus. Areas that test more and follow up more quickly need fewer lockdown measures.

If localized openings are safeguarded and enabled by testing, they can actually help the economy – unlike blanket openings without precautions. People who can trust that a mall is safe because they can't enter it without up-to-date coronavirus test evidence feel safe and will be happy to shop or go to a restaurant there. The risk of infection there is not zero because no test is perfect, but it is sufficiently low.

### Objections to Increased Testing

One argument against increased testing is that it can also lead to false positive results: the test indicates an infection although none exists. Therefore, some people will be quarantined even though they are not infected. This is a disadvantage, but an acceptable price to pay for the chance of early openings.

Another objection to intensified testing and faster tracking is that it would not be possible to create enough testing capacity and to control access to open areas. Indeed, a considerable effort would be required here. However, there is no doubt that much more would be possible than is currently realized. Production capacity for rapid tests, for example, is no longer a serious restriction today – companies just need a commitment from policymakers to demand these tests.

When more testing is done, more cases of infection are found. One could argue that regions that intensify their testing while others do nothing suddenly appear as coronavirus hotspots, even though they are moving toward the opposite. In the end, this only shows that it is not useful to judge the infection situation based on the infections found without taking the testing strategy into account.

### Protect “Green Zones” – Allow Relaxations

Creating locally defined areas where the risk of infection is close to zero and normal life becomes possible again through intensified testing and access control is the core of the No Covid strategy. Such areas are referred to as “Green Zones.” If sufficient schools, factories, and shopping centers are protected in a region through increased testing and tracking, infections will quickly decrease and soon easing of restrictions will be possible throughout the region. If neighboring regions take a different approach and have high infection rates, it will be necessary to prevent infections from being reintroduced. But that does not mean compartmentalization. Those who can prove that they have been tested will be allowed to enter the country. Special rules are possible for commuters, goods deliveries, and hardship cases.

Compliance with the rules can be monitored by spot checks. Thus, even today, more or less strict monitoring is carried out to determine whether people are complying with the coronavirus restrictions. Contrary to what is occasionally claimed, No-covid does not mean that lockdown measures are endlessly extended or even tightened until the virus disappears. A strategy that relies solely or primarily on lockdown measures should be rejected. No-Covid is an opening strategy, but one that provides sustainable openings and protects life and health. Implementing it requires strong commitment from decision-makers at the

community level and cooperation among business, schools, and policymakers. The current strategy of perpetual lockdown prolongation or openings without regard to infection do not offer acceptable alternatives.

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