

FREE CORONA TEST FOR ALL TOURISM EMPLOYEES IN AUSTRIA



In Austria, since 1 July, all local tourism employees with guest contact can voluntarily undergo free corona test. After a pilot operation, the test programme was rolled out to all of Austria.

65,000 PCR tests can be performed weekly. The costs will be borne by the federal government, 150 million euro will be available until the end of the year, said Tourism Minister Elisabeth Köstinger.

"We hope that as many businesses as possible will participate, we have made the programme as broad as possible", said Köstinger. **The aim is that "in the main season, around 70 to 80 % of the businesses take part"**. In this way Austria wants to try to "ensure maximum safety for guests and a holiday experience that is as carefree as possible," said the Minister. The program is "unique worldwide", she said, and there have already been inquiries from other tourism regions.

All workers in an employment relationship subject to social insurance contributions, owners with customer contact as well as service providers in commercial accommodation establishments with customer contacts, such as masseurs or swimming coaches, can be tested. One test per calendar week until 31 October is being sponsored.

"The company or the employee himself registers on the platform and is sent a QR code", explained Köstinger. All laboratories that meet the test standard issued by the AGES can participate. The laboratories are also responsible for the organization of the test. The QR code and a photo ID must be presented when taking the test. The test can take place in the laboratory or in the accommodation establishment or at a general practitioner. Köstinger can also envisage a sample being taken by the Red Cross. The aim is to offer "as much flexibility as possible". The test result should be available within 48 hours. If someone is Covid-19 positive, the health authorities are responsible for the further procedure. In addition, this result is automatically fed into the Epidemiological Notification System.

The Austrian Federal Economic Chamber wants to provide information on labor law issues via an information sheet. In fact, employees have the right to have the PCR test performed during working hours, said Susanne Kraus-Winkler, chairwoman of the Professional Association of the Hotel Industry. Whether or not employees are entitled to reimbursement of travel expenses is still a big question and also depends on the proximity of the company to the laboratory. In any case, the test strategy does not mean bureaucracy for companies and employees. Businesses should only be closed down "if it is really necessary", said Kraus-Winkler.

Köstinger emphasized that "we are in a pandemic and must manage to find infected people as quickly as possible". The tourism test strategy also contributes to this. This is "the survival insurance for the autumn and winter season," said the Minister. After all, by then at the latest, many will be indoors again, where the infection is more likely to occur than outdoors.

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