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Lockdown 'had no effect' on coronavirus pandemic in Germany

Scientists at Munich University found German infection rate was already falling before lockdown was imposed

By Justin Huggler BERLIN

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A new study by German scientists claims to have found evidence that lockdowns may have had little effect on controlling the coronavirus pandemic.

Statisticians at Munich University found “no direct connection” between the German lockdown and falling infection rates in the country.

Instead, the study found infection rates had already clearly begun to fall before a national lockdown was imposed last November.

It also found clear evidence the rate was already falling on the two occasions the lockdown was tightened, in December and April.

The study focused on the R number, which indicates how many people each infected person passes the virus to. The scientists argue it is less easily distorted by fluctuating test rates than the weekly infection rates used by the German government to decide lockdown restrictions.

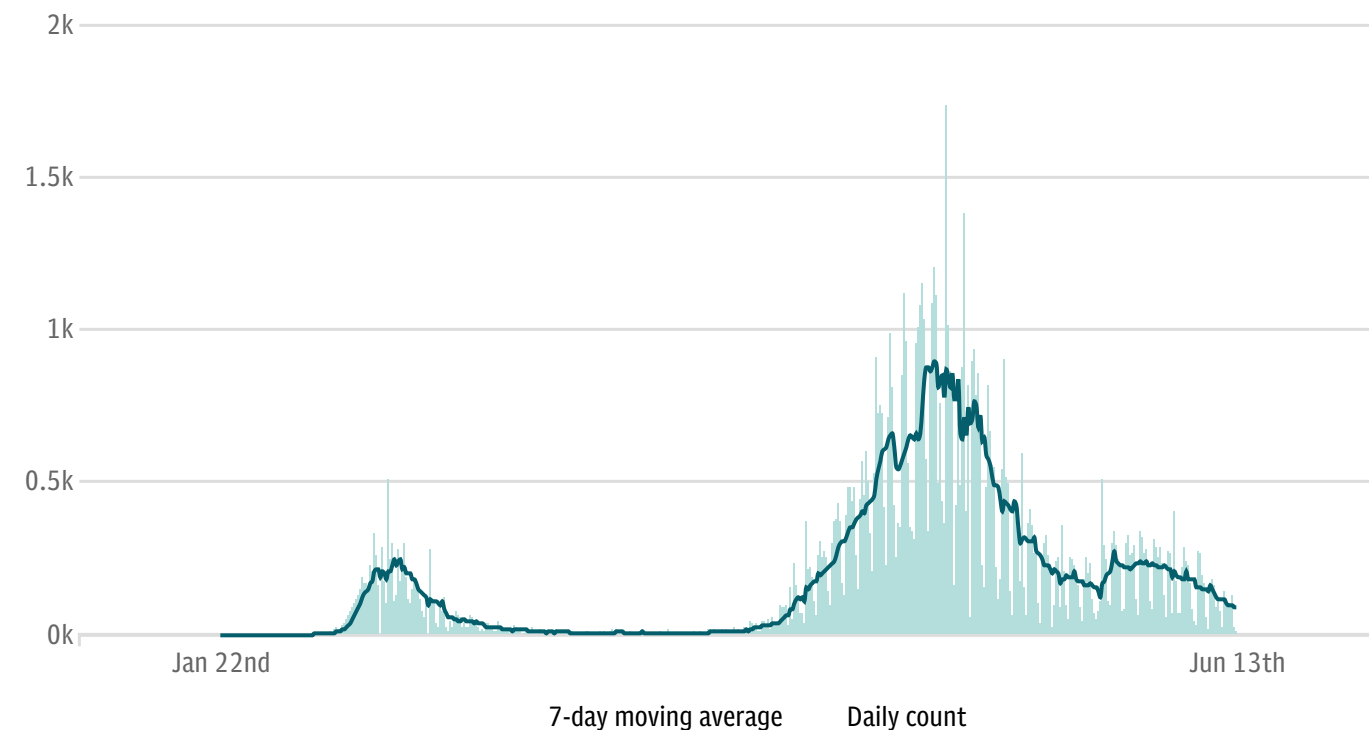
Germany | ▼ Down *

Known cases

Known deaths

Confirmed new deaths

Updated: 13th June, 2021



* Today's 7-day average compared to yesterday's 7-day average



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The study found that on each occasion the R number was already under 1 before the new restrictions came into force, indicating that infections were falling. The lockdown has since been lifted across most of the country.

“The measures taken could have had a positive effect on the course of the infection, but are not solely responsible for the decline,” the study’s authors wrote.

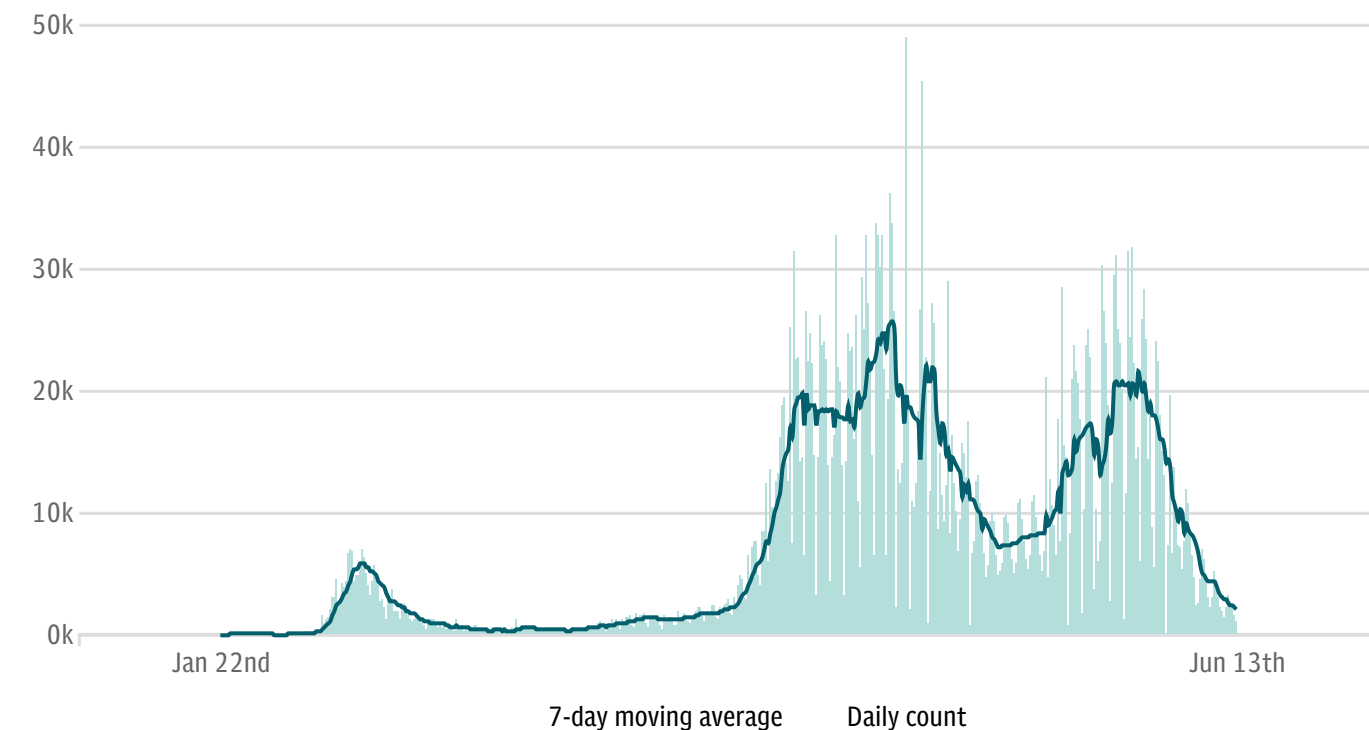
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The study was quickly seized on by lockdown opponents, but its authors were at pains to stress they were not making a political argument.

“You can't tell from the data that the lockdown was unnecessary,” Prof Ralph Brinks, one of the study's co-authors, told German television.

“All that it shows is that the start of lockdown and the fall in infections do not coincide.” Germany went into “lockdown lite”, with restaurants and bars closed but non-essential shops open, on November 2.

It went into full lockdown on December 16, and restrictions were tightened on April 23 under Angela Merkel's "emergency brake".

While no one has disputed the study's figures, other scientists argued the debate over lockdown may have contributed to the fall in infections.

Thorsten Lehr, professor of clinical pharmacy at Saarland University, told German television public discussions over impending lockdown measures may have influenced people to change their behaviour and meet others less.

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