



In Austria the driving schools were reopened on 1st of May 2020 after a lockdown of seven weeks since 16th of March 2020 due to Covid-19. Hereby a brief interview to Mr. Stefan Ebner from Austrian driving schools association.

What steps have been taken to obtain the possibility of reopening?

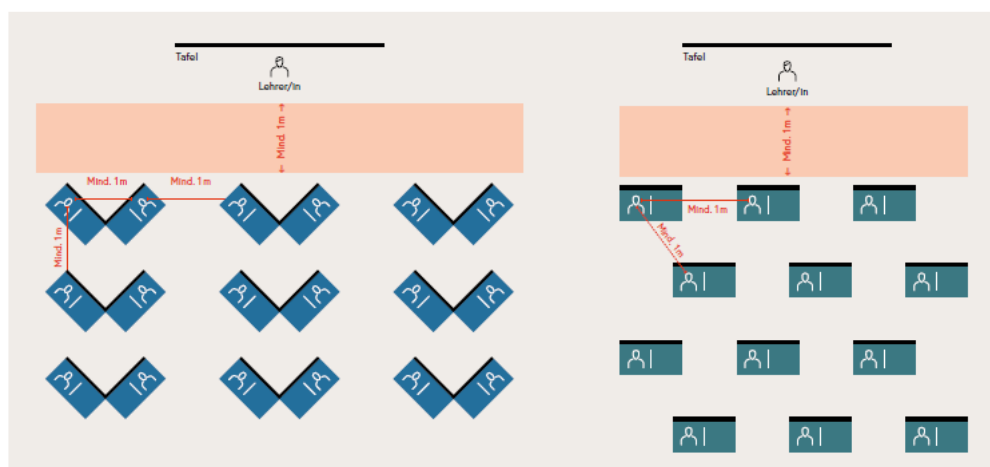
The Austrian driving schools restarted again on 1st of May. People could go out again for private reasons. The provision of services like the driver's license training was again permitted. Since the mid of March the driving schools were 100 percent closed for 7 weeks. The Minister of Health has issued individual statutory provisions for the reopening of driving schools. It took a lot of political effort from the association to reach this early reopening. We had luck in Austria.

What security measures have you taken to be able to reopen? In the classroom, in the car and in the office

The Austrian Driving Schools Association drew up a handbook about keeping the 1m minimum distance and using a protection mask. The handbook lists additionally some general hygienic measures.

Classroom training

- Classroom: 1m minimum distance between all persons is required.
- Learner driver: Mask is obligatory (oronasal protective device).
- Driving school teacher: Alternatively an acrylic (plexiglass) protective wall or full-face protection on the teacher's head (visor) instead of the mask can be used. The mouth-nose-mask has to protect the others. There is no FFP2 mask standard for own protection and that of others required.
- Distance learning can't replace face-to-face teaching
E-Learning is voluntary in Austria and supports the learner drivers additionally to 32 hours minimum classroom training (100 percent frontal teaching). Nevertheless a political discussion about the role of E-Learning started in Austria.





Practical driving training

- In the Car: 1m minimum distance is not required
- Learner driver and driving teacher: Mask is obligatory (oronasal protective device).
- Alternatively a (plexiglass) visor instead of the mask is can be used by the vehicle occupants. The mouth-nose-mask protects the others. There is no FFP2 mask standard for own protection and that of others required.
- On the motorcycle, moped: own helmet hood, own jacket (are recommended). At the practice site (during the training in public space) no 1m distance and no mask are required.





Do exams take place regularly?

Practical exams were started in Austria on 18th of May. The ministry of transport fixed certain requirements. A maximum of three people are allowed in the vehicle (candidate, driving teacher, examiner). Generally in Austria four people are allowed (in taxis, in vans). Recirculation of air inside the vehicle is forbidden (instead of fresh air). Briefly ventilating the vehicle after the driving test and regularly disinfecting the contact surfaces (steering wheel, gear lever) or using your own protective gloves are further specifications. Some provinces enforced some additional hygienic safety standards for examiners.

Have you accumulated a very long waiting list of candidates?

In Austria, around 15,000 students are waiting for a theoretical or practical driving test, that means around 50 to 100 learner drivers per driving school.

When do you expect the exam waiting list to end?

We learned some lessons.

1st experience: After reopening, it were the registered learner drivers who came immediately back to the driving schools in May to continue and finish their training which was interrupted by the lockdown in March.

2nd experience: The huge crowd of new learner drivers and new starters wasn't as big as expected. Perhaps the families have less money due to unemployment or short-time work and want to wait with further financial expenditures.

3rd experience: Driving schools have much work and many candidates (for three months in advance). The bottleneck are the examination dates offered by the authorities upon request by driving schools. The available exam dates are not sufficient.

4th experience: The costs of driving licences can be raised. Because of the overtime (surcharges), additional working hours (shifts) and smaller groups in the classrooms, the driving schools have higher costs.

5th experience: E-Learning became a topic in the political discussion. The Austrian Driving Schools start a dialogue with the government, which parts of the curriculum can be absolved electronically only and which course content has to be trained in the traditional classroom (by face-to-face tuition) further on.