

Rushed relaxation of coronavirus measures in Germany puts thousands of lives at risk

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The measures to control the coronavirus pandemic are being relaxed too quickly and in an uncontrolled manner. Thousands of lives are unnecessarily being put at risk. All over the world, governments place the interests of big business above the health and lives of working people, who are paying a high price for this.

This was evident on May 12 of all days, International Nursing Day. It is the 200th birthday of Florence Nightingale, the statistician and world-renowned pioneer of nursing.

Worldwide, well over 90,000 nurses have been infected with the coronavirus. At least 260 of them have died of COVID-19. These are the official figures presented by the International Council of Nurses (ICN). They are undoubtedly many times too low because numerous countries do not measure these figures or refuse to publish them.

In Germany, too, the full extent of deaths from pandemic is not known. According to the public health body Robert Koch Institute (RKI), more than 10,100 health workers were infected with COVID-19 by May 5, and 16 of them have died. This is according to an RKI report published last week. Since not all coronavirus cases are broken down by occupational groups, this is by no means the complete number.

For five days now, the decisive reproduction rate of the virus has again been above or around the critical value of 1.0 in Germany. The value indicates how many more people an infected person infects with the virus on average during his or her illness. This value, which was 1.13 on Sunday evening, thus indicates that the number of new infections is beginning to rise again significantly.

According to the RKI report, almost 7,500 cases of coronavirus have been reported from refugee facilities, homeless shelters and prisons alone, with the number of

deaths among them amounting to at least 31 people—here too, with an admitted number of unreported cases.

With the general relaxation of the coronavirus measures, the COVID-19 figures from schools, retirement homes, local transport, industry and the entire working population are inevitably on the rise again. At least 25 construction workers at the “Stuttgart 21” tunnel project have tested positive. In a call centre in Bremen, 11 employees have become infected and 50 more could be affected. They were in a “too small” room, as the company admitted to the media website “buten-un-binnen,”

The districts with meat industry businesses, where hundreds of slaughterhouse workers tested positive for COVID-19 at the end of last week, are considered true coronavirus hotspots.

Since then, the number of infections in the district of Coesfeld in Münsterland (North Rhine-Westphalia, NRW) has continued to rise dramatically. The Westfleisch slaughterhouse had to shut down operations on Friday after 151 mostly Romanian workers had tested positive for COVID-19. In the entire county, the critical number of new infections per 100,000 inhabitants at the end of the week was 96—almost twice the critical limit of 50 new infections per 100,000 inhabitants set by the RKI. In the Münsterland region, including the city of Münster, more than 4,000 people had fallen ill with COVID-19 and 160 had died by May 11.

In Thuringia, the Sonneberg district has proven to be a new hotspot; a hospital with COVID-19 patients is the focus of infection. There, at least 20 employees have become infected with the coronavirus. However, not all 600 employees have been tested yet.

Schooling has proved to be particularly problematic

and has been gradually resumed in practically all German states since April 27. No sooner had the schools been opened than reports of coronavirus cases started piling up among pupils from all over Germany, and many individual classes or entire schools have had to close again. This affects, for example, the Nicolaus Kistner High School in Mosbach, near Heilbronn (Baden-Württemberg). There, after a confirmed coronavirus case, the school management decided to discontinue classroom lessons until the beginning of the final year examinations.

In Rheingau-Taunus (Hesse), the Theisstalschule in Niedernhausen sent an entire class and three teachers into quarantine after a student tested positive for COVID-19. The Albert Schweitzer School in Offenbach is also affected. Five days after reopening, one pupil fell ill with coronavirus. About 30 people, including three teachers, are now in quarantine there.

In Sinzig in Rhineland-Palatinate, classes for an entire year were suspended when a 17-year-old high school student tested positive for COVID-19. In the same town, testing revealed that an employee at a senior citizens' home had also fallen ill with the coronavirus, putting another 52 contacts in the home at risk.

The health department and school management of a grammar school in Düsseldorf, the capital of North Rhine-Westphalia, reacted differently when two students there also fell ill with COVID-19. Only the two affected students were sent to home quarantine. The reason given was that none of their other classmates or teachers was a "Category 1 contact person."

At the same time, medical and virologist warnings of lax handling of the virus are increasing. In an interview with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, intensive care physician Matthias Baumgärtel from the Nuremberg North Clinic warned urgently against underestimating the virus.

Baumgärtel emphasised that numerous patients who died of COVID-19 in his clinic, despite intensive care, had "no significant previous illnesses" and could "certainly have lived for many years or decades." "The youngest patient we lost was 38 years old—she too had no previous illness ... Of course, the older the patients are, the more dangerous the illness is. But even those in their mid-50s have a hard time coping with it if they have intensive care."

In fact, COVID-19 turns out to be not just a lung disease, but a "multi-organ disease ... many patients get thromboses, dangerous clots in the blood vessels. A lot of our patients go into liver failure. The kidney is often a problem, and of course the heart. We also experience neurological symptoms: patients with strokes, even younger ones. One patient experienced sudden paralysis."

Baumgärtel went on to say that he was "surprised every day by the relaxation [of coronavirus measures] of the federal and state governments." "It's just going too fast." It was obvious that the initial restrictions had "saved thousands of lives because people were not infected and did not have to go to hospital. I can only warn against the recklessness of wanting too much too fast now."

The interview confirms what the *World Socialist Web Site* has long warned: the ruling class is not only endangering the health of hundreds of thousands of workers and students and their families and friends but also their lives.



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