

# New COVID-19 outbreaks in Germany and Berlin's inhumane quarantine conditions

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When the interests of big business are at stake, all safety precautions are thrown overboard as millions of workers are forced back to work under precarious conditions. If these workers then become infected, they are kept in their cramped apartments, sometimes using brutal methods. Even the most elementary assistance is denied them.

This is particularly evident in the Berlin district of Neukölln, where the largest proportion of poor households in the capital is concentrated. On June 5, two pupils from different schools in the borough tested positive for the coronavirus. Since June 13, 369 households, each containing one to 10 people, have been quarantined. A total of seven locations in the district are affected.

On Friday, it was learned that 94 persons had a positive result out of some 586 tests carried out. The number is expected to rise even further in the next few days, as the testing of all households has not yet been completed.

Of the persons who tested positive, 41, i.e., about half, are children under 18 years of age, some of whom are subject to compulsory schooling. In this context, eight schools are known to have individuals who tested positive.

Currently, 25 members of the pandemic staff are busy tracing the chains of infection, and five military personnel are involved in maintaining the lists and telephone service, according to Neukölln city councillor Falko Liecke (Christian Democratic Union, CDU). Nevertheless, the origin of the transmission into the blocks of flats has not yet been clearly determined. There are, however, indications that the outbreak was connected with the Christian community, to which several of the positively tested persons belonged. They had participated in a Pentecostal service.

The rapid and concentrated outbreak of COVID-19 in precisely these blocks of flats, however, can only rationally be explained by the cramped and poor housing conditions in which the residents have to live. A large proportion of the inhabitants are newly arrived immigrants and families from poor European Union (EU) member states. With an average size of 70 square metres, they are forced to live crowded together in households of up to 10 people.

Just as in the meat industry, in refugee accommodation and in shelters for the homeless, such circumstances provide the virus with the best chance of spreading quickly and effectively among residents and forming a hotspot.

The quarantine ordered by the district authorities for the 369 households in 13 housing blocks forces residents to remain packed together for two weeks in apartments where many children live. Under such circumstances, it is highly likely that entire households will become infected, as distancing rules cannot be observed in overcrowded rooms.

But neither the district, the state of Berlin nor the German federal government has done anything to at least make the quarantine humane and safe—for example, by renting hotel rooms. Not even the supply of food is guaranteed.

The district mayor had initially announced that the supply of basic foodstuffs would be safeguarded. However, this was not distributed among the households until the fourth day after the imposed curfew, in the form of 75 boxes.

Some residents told the *Nordkurier* on June 18 that the authorities had not taken care of their needs. In the first few days, they had been supplied with “food and drink” mainly by friends and the neighbouring school. Only a few residents could afford the additional costs

of a delivery from the supermarket. Furthermore, one resident told the newspaper that the food supplies in his household, in which nine people lived, had already been used up after two days.

The concentrated COVID-19 outbreak in Berlin Neukölln shows very clearly that people who have to live in impoverished conditions are particularly at risk of contracting the virus.

While the residents affected are locked up in cramped conditions, the eight schools where pupils have tested positive for the virus remain open until the holidays. According to councillor Liecke, it is sufficient to quarantine the affected learning groups from the schools where the infections first appeared.

While the district authorities are not doing anything to improve living conditions for those in quarantine, the affected students are being threatened with severe repression, as in other places. Thus, the district is legally authorized to use the police against repeated quarantine breakers. In several refugee accommodations in Baden-Württemberg this is already being practised by the police and military.

In Göttingen, too, police are being deployed to monitor the quarantine of about 700 people in a high-rise complex. The building was quarantined last week and largely cordoned off by the police. On Friday, 120 positive cases were reported, but testing has not yet been completed.

People in this building also live in extremely precarious housing conditions. In the entire block, the apartments are between 19 and 37 square metres in size. Many of the apartments are occupied by families with several children. According to the city, a total of around 200 minors live there in insecure conditions.

On Saturday, when 200 residents tried to oppose the curfew, as such quarantine conditions are unacceptable for those affected, the police acted against them using 300 officers. According to the police, this led to an arrest and arguments between cops and residents.

It is becoming increasingly clear who has to pay the price for the policy of reopening business, which is being pushed forward by all the establishment parties: the poorest all over the world. They are hit hardest by the virus and the quarantine conditions. As the WSWS recently reported, there is a direct link between low income, an increased risk of illness and a severe course of the disease, which is 87 percent higher for welfare

recipients than for those receiving regular unemployment benefits.

It is therefore not surprising that the district of Neukölln, in particular, has the second-highest number of COVID-19 sufferers in Berlin, with around 957 cases. According to the 2019 Social Report of Berlin-Brandenburg, which refers to figures from 2018, Neukölln has the highest proportion of inhabitants at risk of poverty, at 27.4 percent. With the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, the figures will be even higher in 2020.



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