

# German schools reopen despite increase in coronavirus infections

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Although the number of COVID-19 infections are on the rise in Germany, all 16 state governments are pressing ahead with their plans to reopen schools, endangering the lives of hundreds of thousands of teachers, students and their families. More than 1,000 new infections were reported by the Robert Koch Institute in its daily bulletin yesterday for the first time since May. New hotspots are developing in several regions.

A total of 231 seasonal workers have tested positive for COVID-19 at a vegetable farm in Mamming, Lower Bavaria. This means almost half of the company's workforce has been infected with COVID-19. In the same area, another 166 workers at a vegetable processing plant tested positive. In Schwäbisch Gmünd in the state of Baden-Württemberg the number of people infected following their attendance at a funeral has risen to 100. In Wiesbaden, 18 attendees at a party tested positive. The test centre at the Rhein-Main airport reported that more than 1 percent of returning tourists have tested positive.

As in other countries, the ruling elite bears full responsibility for the resurgence of cases. The renewed spread of the virus is the product of the premature reopening of the economy, which is aimed at sending workers back to their jobs as quickly as possible and reviving the tourist sector. The return to "normal procedure" in schools is part of this ruthless policy, which will provoke a situation similar to that in March and April, when health care systems collapsed across Europe and tens of thousands died.

The situation in Germany has already changed dramatically, warned Ute Rexroth of the Robert Koch Institute earlier this week. No single district or state stands out any longer as an epicentre, she added. There are "unfortunately many affected ... there were between

five and 25 new infections over the past week in 112 districts."

"We are in the midst of a permanent wave," stated Frank-Ulrich Montgomery, president of the World Medical Association and former head of the doctors' trade union. He pointed to the high risk of infection and noted that in countries with poor health care systems, between 10 and 12 percent of those infected would die. But even in Germany, where conditions are "a lot better," a "single-digit percentage of those infected by COVID-19" will die, he added.

According to the Robert Koch Institute's official figures, 9,168 people have died due to COVID-19 in Germany. Around the world, over 700,000 people have lost their lives.

In an opinion piece for *Die Zeit*, Christian Drosten, the chief virologist at Berlin's Charité hospital, warned that a second wave of the coronavirus would develop an entirely different dynamic than the first. The virus will "spread out of the population," appearing simultaneously nationwide. It would therefore be "harder to trace." To combat newly developing outbreaks in a more targeted way, all members of "clusters" would have to be quarantined. "Many could be highly infectious without knowing it," stated Drosten.

These warnings are being ignored by the state governments and all parliamentary parties. As the holidays come to an end, all previously implemented school closures are being abandoned. In order to ensure the capitalists can turn a profit, all established parties, from the Christian Social Union to the Left Party, are pushing for a return to regular in-person teaching. Schools in the state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania opened on Monday. Hamburg's schools opened yesterday, and Berlin, Brandenburg, North

Rhine-Westphalia and Schleswig-Holstein will follow next Monday.

Children are often returning to buildings where classrooms are overcrowded, technology is outdated, and sanitary facilities are dilapidated, which increases the likelihood of infections. Already on the second day of school, a case of COVID-19 was confirmed in a student at a sports high school in Neubrandenburg in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania.

“Initially, sources around the school stated that everyone would stay home on Wednesday,” reported the Nordkurier. But “this order” was subsequently “changed.” There were also “no additional safety measures taken in the school, no extra disinfectant and no stricter requirement for masks in classrooms.”

The official safety and protection measures adopted by the various state governments are not worth the paper they are written on. A teacher from North Rhine-Westphalia, the most populous state, expressed his anger at the approach taken by the state government in a letter to the *World Socialist Web Site*. As he wrote, the health of all involved “is a high priority in name only,” while in reality it is being trampled underfoot. The North Rhine-Westphalian government’s requirement that masks must be worn in schools, which has been widely praised in the media, is merely “a fig leaf to conceal the total disregard for social distancing.”

Teachers with relatives in at-risk groups are also being exposed to the risk of infection. Teachers with pre-existing conditions do not need to attend school, together with students who have relatives at high risk. However, teachers with relatives at greater risk from the coronavirus are not permitted to do so. “Hardly a word” is uttered in the information leaflet from Education Minister Yvonne Gebauer “about the unnecessary risk of infection created by the normal operating of schools, especially for the large numbers of family members of students and employees. In the view of the ministry, young people don’t play a particularly important role as transmitters of the disease,” wrote the teacher.

North Rhine-Westphalia’s Schools Ministry “is also showing with its approach to testing that it does not understand how the coronavirus spreads,” continued the teacher. “Although teachers can get tested on a voluntary basis every 14 days, the ministry simply ignores the hundreds of thousands of students as

transmitters of the virus. No tests at all are being made available for students, even though studies from South Korea, Germany and the US demonstrate that children aged 10 and over spread the virus at least as much, if not more, than adults.”

What the ministry refers to as “adjusted in-person teaching” will, in practice, mean that “students will arrive in large class groups in classrooms that are far too small, but will also be taught in mixed groups for selected subjects and project groups ... after primary school. Following up infections is therefore not only complicated and time-consuming due to the use of public transport, but also because of the varied mixing of groups in the schools,” the teacher noted.

Against all scientific advice, school celebrations, excursions and school trips “are not only being approved, but actually encouraged,” he explained. “What the minister describes as cultural life should promote what she believes is the general enthusiasm over the reopening of schools. For example, in music class, wind instruments can even be played with some (undefined) distancing. Group singing is only allowed outdoors or in holiday camps. ... Sports class will take place without any masks or distancing requirements.”

The latter is even planned to take place in indoor sports halls in the autumn. “Although the changing rooms are small, they should just be used by smaller groups (for lessons lasting 45 or a maximum of 90 minutes!) and what will happen with the showers??? Swimming classes are also back on, including with the use of school buses to get there.” None of this is accidental, concluded the teacher. Politicians are deliberately imposing the reopening policy “to complete their experiment of herd immunity.”



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