

German authorities cover up COVID-19 infections in Hamburg schools

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21 August 2020

Due to the reopening of schools, countless people in Germany have already become infected with the deadly coronavirus within a few days.

Events in Hamburg show how recklessly the authorities are putting the lives of teachers, pupils and parents at risk and covering up the true extent of the pandemic. The state government reopened schools on August 6. Since then, at least 59 students and teachers have tested positive, the *Hamburger Abendblatt* reported on Tuesday.

According to the article, the school board reports that there are currently 44 active cases in at least 35 schools in Hamburg, with at least 41 schools affected. Of the 59 cases, 55 are students, and only in four cases have teachers or other school employees been proven to be infected, the newspaper said.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with Angelika, a teacher whose name we changed at her request. “I am very cautious because you could expect to face repression if you talk about this in public,” she said. Angelika works at one of the affected schools in the Hamburg district of Eidelstedt.

“At our school, a girl tested positive and was taken out of school by the health department for this reason. There is said to have been no Category 1 contact—i.e., 15 minutes face-to-face—because she was supposed to have been sitting alone at a table with a mask in the classroom. For this reason, classes continued as normal—this was a decision of the health department.”

Although in Hamburg, as in almost all other federal states, there is neither a social distancing rule nor a mask requirement for lessons, the Eimsbüttel District Office justified the decision by stating that the affected pupil had “no close contact” with her fellow pupils in the full classroom.

“In Hamburg, there are now many schools with

coronavirus incidents,” Angelika reported. According to media reports, at least 11 new coronavirus cases were reported in Hamburg last weekend alone—at 11 different schools. However, Angelika is certain that the cases are “covered up by the school and health authorities and not made public. ... There are more than the schools named in the articles. Our case was not made public at first, and I know of two others that were not in the press either.”

“I talked to my neighbour, whose grandson goes to another school,” she continued, “There was also an incident there and a colleague had to stay at home for several days because her daughter was sitting next to a person who tested positive in the schoolyard.”

On Friday, the *Abendblatt* reported four cases at four different schools in Hamburg, which had become known the day before. There had been no “further measures,” in particular, “no quarantine measures or further testing had been ordered by the health authorities,” the newspaper said. The cases have “so far remained without consequences.” This applies in particular to cases in which, as in Angelika’s school, infected pupils had taken part in lessons and had not been detected at first.

Due to earlier infections, 15 more school classes are currently in quarantine in Hamburg. In total, around 40 cases of infection are now officially registered every day in Hamburg—many of them in refugee accommodation, where residents often live together in inhumane conditions in a very confined space. Apart from the local newspaper *Abendblatt*, no other major newspaper has reported the ominous developments in the German megacity.

“So far, one hardly reads about infections in Hamburg schools. But when you hear from colleagues that it is affecting considerably more schools, you

wonder why this is not being made public, as in our case! And above all: Why is the school environment not tested in a confirmed case?”

The answer to these questions can only be that a deliberate policy is being pursued. Children are sent to school without protection, the lie is spread that this is not contagious, and if they do become infected, the cases are systematically covered up. Not even the most basic quarantine measures are taken, and the authorities are instructed to test as little as possible. At the same time, students and parents themselves are blamed for the developing disaster.

The latter was the purpose of the appearance of Hamburg’s Mayor Peter Tschentscher (Social Democratic Party, SPD) in the ARD broadcast “Hard but Fair” on Monday. To distract from the dangerous policy of reopening schools without compulsory masks and distancing rules, he blamed the “phenomenon of holiday returnees,” “private parties” and the population’s “lack of discipline” for the “problems we have in Hamburg.” In the same breath he declared, “Wildly testing doesn’t help.”

[coment]PHOTO: Tschentscher, together with Chancellor Merkel at a press conference on opening policy, on 17 June (AP Photo/Markus Schreiber, Pool)[/comment]

The same ignorance and indifference of the ruling class was expressed by Tschentscher’s spokesman for the school authorities, Peter Albrecht, when he told the *Hamburger Abendblatt* on Monday that the infection figures at Hamburg schools were “altogether of little concern.” He confirmed to the newspaper, “In the case of new infections, only those affected are in quarantine.”

“The handling of cases seems to be similar everywhere,” Angelika concluded. “Today, we received a letter from the authorities telling us how to proceed. It is very clear from this letter that the schools have little decision-making power in the case of confirmed or suspected cases. It is completely up to the health authorities—and they will also have their instructions on how (late) they can react!”

Two weeks ago, Hamburg’s Senator (state minister) for Education, Ties Rabe, announced that 30,000 medical masks and 30,000 transparent visors would be made available to schools. “It was only on the fourth day after school started that every teacher received a

single FFP-2 disposable mask!” Angelika reported. “The school office and janitor received nothing! We will have to get down on our knees in gratitude!”

The ruling class is determined to keep schools open despite the rapidly increasing number of infections, against the resistance of pupils, parents and teachers.

In an interview with the daily *Die Welt* before the summer holidays, Senator Rabe repeated the lie that the risk of infection in children under 10 is much lower than originally assumed. Therefore, according to Rabe, “if there is a possible increase in infections, the school must not be automatically closed first, but other measures must then be considered. It must then be, schools [close] last.”

This policy is now being put into practice. “School closures are to be prevented by all means possible,” Angelika said, summarizing the attitude of the Hamburg state government. “We teachers in Hamburg feel like guinea pigs. We are one of the first federal states to have reopened schools. That is perhaps one reason why the numbers are being kept down. “Things have to go well, otherwise it will be more difficult for the other states to start a total opening up...”

Schools must remain open so that parents are fully available to the labour market again and profits are once again bubbling. Although they do not say this openly, the federal and state governments are pursuing a policy of “herd immunity,” which deliberately accepts mass infections and fatalities in the interests of the capitalist economy.



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