German schools reopening without safety measures as coronavirus cases increase

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With 2,034 new coronavirus infections in Germany, Friday's daily increase exceeded the 2,000-mark for the first time since the end of April. Under these conditions, the federal and state governments are setting the stage for a further explosion in the number of cases by reopening schools, spreading the deadly virus throughout the population.

Nationwide, there is a large number of individual outbreak incidents—in the last seven days, only 15 of 294 German districts had no COVID-19 cases to report. According to the official figures, 9,272 COVID-19 patients have died, while the documented cases of infection, at 233,575, are approaching the quarter-million mark.

One of the German states with the largest increase in new cases is Hesse (whose largest city is Frankfurt), in central Germany. Here, the health authorities have been reporting new coronavirus infections in the triple digits every day for a week now. In Offenbach alone, over 500 people are in quarantine. In the meantime, no district or city in Hesse has been without new infections in the past seven days.

The development is particularly threatening in the cities of the Rhine-Main area. In Offenbach and Hanau, for example, the critical threshold of 50 infections per 100,000 inhabitants has been significantly exceeded in the past few days.

In these circumstances, the reopening of schools without serious safety precautions means the creation of countless potential super-spreading events. Although the Robert Koch Institute (German government agency and research institute responsible for disease control and prevention) has been issuing explicit warnings against "crowds of people indoors" for weeks, this is precisely the situation in schools and daycare centres on a daily basis.

In Hesse, entire school classes in Wiesbaden, Bad Nauheim, Büdingen and Homberg (Efze) were sent home to quarantine in the first week of school because coronavirus infections had been detected in one student. In Frankfurt, the second school week after the summer vacations, began Monday with the announcement of the compulsory wearing of masks at all secondary schools.

However, practically all German states are affected by new cases of coronavirus in schools. In addition to the numerous reports from schools in Berlin and Hamburg, at least 16 schools in Schleswig-Holstein in northern Germany were also affected by cases of infection last week, shortly after reopening.

In North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), too, there are particularly large numbers of new infections at schools. In Bochum, the entire Willy Brandt comprehensive school had to remain closed Monday because a teacher who had been at school on Friday tested positive for the virus. In the district of Minden-Lübbecke, the entire Lahde-Frille elementary school network had to be closed at the same time, as COVID-19 cases had occurred in several classes.

As a large city in the Ruhr area, Duisburg is also severely affected, in addition to Dortmund. Last week, there were cases at eight schools. These are elementary schools, comprehensive schools and a vocational college. The Duisburg example highlights the fact that the danger of infection with the coronavirus cannot be separated from social inequality: the affected schools are all located close to each other in Duisburg's working-class districts.

According to reports, however, the schools and affected classes reacted in a less than systematic manner because of a lack of equipment. Since, as teachers reported, the elementary schools had too few masks, they were closed for days, while the vocational college sent only individual affected classes into quarantine. On the internet, numerous students are reporting on crowded corridors, classrooms and public transportation and documenting this with pictures.

At the same time, testing capacities are diminishing

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because the government has not linked the reopening of schools with the creation of new laboratories and testing facilities. For this reason, coronavirus tests threaten to become scarce in the autumn as the cold spell begins. Charité hospital chief virologist Christian Drosten therefore recently issued an urgent warning to this effect and called on previously endangered returnees to self-quarantine.

On Instagram, Schülerstreik-NRW (Pupil strike NRW), a student at a vocational school, reports about a confirmed coronavirus case at her school. “Only this pupil and the person sitting directly next to her are no longer at school. The teachers and the rest of the class are still in school after having been together in a classroom for the last few days.”

Similar reports of a lack of testing, lack of quarantine and even cover-ups of coronavirus cases at schools have already reached the *World Socialist Web Site* from other cities. In this way, governments and authorities are systematically preparing new explosions of infections and deliberately implementing a murderous policy of contamination.

Politicians of all parties have made it clear that they will not close schools again under any circumstances or implement comprehensive security measures. They are not concerned about the students or parents, but exclusively about the interests of big business, which wants to ramp up production again and therefore wants to ensure that children can be accommodated without additional costs.

In Saxony, Health Minister Petra Köpping (Social Democratic Party, SPD) rules out new school closures outright. Köpping told the *Sächsische Zeitung* that she does not expect a second lockdown, despite rising infection numbers. It would “not come to that, that we have to resort to such measures as we had,” the SPD politician said on Saturday.

Schools should under no circumstances be closed again, announced former Federal Minister for Family Affairs Kristina Schröder (Christian Democratic Union, CDU). She has left office to take up a position as ambassador for the neoliberal think tank INSM (Initiative Neue Soziale Marktwirtschaft). In her speech, she takes a clear stand against new school closures in order to keep the economy running: “If this time we have to discuss closures as a whole again, then this time it should not be schools and day-care centres first, but schools and day-care centres last.”

At the same time, resistance is growing among students, parents and teachers to the unsafe school reopenings.

“Opening schools for regular operations is a difficult task for me,” says Andrea from NRW. “My 13-year-old daughter is the only child in her class wearing a mask. That won’t work for long.” For politicians, “boosting the economy has priority,” she continues. Apparently, “nobody wants to mess with the business lobby.”

Schülerstreik-NRW, who is calling for a student strike in NRW, asks, “What has to happen first for something to change? Sometimes I really think: Does someone have to die of coronavirus to close the school? I feel that I am not taken seriously by the politicians, etc., because I can say on behalf of many: Things can’t continue like this anymore!”

The call by the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) to form action committees and prepare a general strike against the murderous reopening of schools is meeting with a large response on social media.

“Teachers and students should go on strike nationwide,” Ily M. writes on Twitter. “The politically prescribed school reopenings with their completely inadequate ‘safety measures’ are clearly failing. I have the feeling that I can no longer keep still and allow our children to be the victims of the ministers of education. I think we must organize and discuss a nationwide strike—otherwise, they will send our children and teachers to the slaughter.”

“This also applies to educators, nurses and doctors,” says Sara, a nurse from Berlin Mitte. “There is hardly a profession that is exposed to a higher risk of infection than nursing. What do we do for ourselves if politically responsible persons do not even provide sufficient protective clothing and do not even allow testing for us—do we continue like this?”

Anja, a special education teacher who herself had fallen ill with COVID-19 and is now struggling with the consequences, agrees with this call. “Yes, please strike! Become active! … The more protection at the workplace, the less luck you need to avoid infection.”

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