

# Catastrophic increase of coronavirus infections in Germany

Gregor Link  
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The coronavirus policies of Germany's federal and state governments have set the stage for a catastrophic development, threatening the lives and health of millions. According to figures from the Johns Hopkins University, new coronavirus infections in Germany yesterday reached a new record of over 12,500, with the death toll rising by 40 to 10,084. Across Europe, the total number of new coronavirus infections reached almost 8 million.

The virus is spreading faster and faster worldwide. Since January, over 380,000 people in Germany have been infected with COVID-19, more than one in ten of those within the last seven days. According to the current Robert Koch Institute (RKI) management report, this applies to almost every federal state—in Bremen, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Hesse, almost one in five of total cases developed last week.

The fact that many politicians and federal officials have tested positive in recent days also highlights the dynamics of the pandemic. Besides Federal Health Minister Jens Spahn, who yesterday went into domestic quarantine with “cold symptoms,” the entire leadership of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (as the secret service is called) is affected. Labour Minister Hubertus Heil and Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier are in quarantine due to contact with infected persons. There have been a total of 37 cases of infection among members and employees of the Bundestag (federal parliament) since March.

When the pandemic spread rapidly for the first time in the spring, due to the inaction of European governments, there were dramatic scenes in many regions of Europe. In the northern Italian region of Bergamo, for example, the military had to move in at night to remove coffins that could no longer be buried by the regional crematoria despite operating round the clock. In Spain, corpses had to be temporarily stored in Olympic ice sports arenas, while hospitals—similar to those in France and other countries—increasingly developed into infection clusters because nursing staff were denied any adequate protection.

Across Europe, the pandemic has already cost more than 247,000 lives—a loss of life surpassing anything that has occurred on the continent since the Second World War. Now, mass mortality is threatened on a scale that will go far beyond

the previous catastrophe if no drastic measures are taken to contain the virus.

Hans Kluge, the World Health Organization's (WHO) Regional Director for Europe, said at a press conference on Thursday that COVID-19 is currently “the fifth leading cause of death and the point of 1,000 deaths per day has now been exceeded.” In Belgium, infected nurses are already being forced back to work because otherwise, health care would collapse.

The same “work until you die” policy is increasingly being imposed by the authorities on people in non-essential industries and businesses that should have been closed long ago. For example, workers at the Weidemark slaughterhouse in Sögel, Lower Saxony, were sent back to work this week, even though at least 112 of their colleagues had already been infected with the coronavirus in the unfiltered, cold and recirculating factory air. Instead, the district authorities ordered a so-called “work quarantine” in order not to further reduce “slaughter capacities.” The theory is that workers “move only between work and home” and otherwise are “isolated.” In other words, workers live only to produce surplus value.

Carola Reimann (Social Democratic Party, SPD), Lower Saxony's Minister of Social Affairs, spoke of a “good solution” that would “protect against infection” and “address the serious problems of farmers.” Regional spokespersons of the German Trade Union Federation (DGB) and the Union of Food and Catering Workers (NGG) declared that there was “no legal basis” to end this slave-owner policy.

The RKI's status report makes an urgent appeal for “the entire population to commit itself to infection control,” without mentioning the government's policy of opening up the economy. According to the Institute, “case clusters” and “outbreaks” are observed especially “in old people's homes and nursing homes” and “in companies.”

The report documents a sharp increase in the proportion of old people among the newly infected since the beginning of September. In the “70 years or older” age group, there has been a 75 percent increase in the number of new infections in the last two weeks, from 2,032 to 3,521. In mid-August—after the reopening of schools—two-thirds of the new infections were still accounted for by the under-40s.

Despite this deadly danger for the 700,000 people over 70 years of age who are in care homes throughout Germany, the federal and state governments' latest "Decision to combat the coronavirus pandemic" states that "the respective regulations must not lead to the complete social isolation of those affected." This must "always be taken into account."

The media propaganda that young people and other "irresponsible" private individuals are responsible for the renewed ballooning of the pandemic has now been strikingly refuted by empirical surveys.

For example, the latest youth study conducted by the Social Science Research Centre Berlin (WZB) and the TUI Foundation revealed that 52 percent of those surveyed considered the protective measures currently still in place to be appropriate, and a further 23 percent considered them "insufficient." According to the survey carried out by the YouGov opinion research institute, 83 percent of young people also adhere to the measures and do so predominantly to "protect others" and to "protect their own health"—not so much because of possible penalties for disregarding them.

These were "similar figures to those we know from adult surveys," WZB analyst Marcus Spittler noted on Thursday on broadcaster ZDF's *Morgenmagazin*.

The results of the study once again make clear that the main cause of the dramatic increase in infections is not the private behaviour of young people and workers, but the opening up of businesses and schools. This is an international phenomenon and affects all age groups. As Michael Wagner, Professor of Microbiology in Vienna and Aalborg (Denmark) explained on Twitter: "SARS-CoV-2 infections now occur in most elementary schools in Malmö."

On Wednesday, the administrative court in Neustadt/Weinstrasse rejected the urgent injunction sought for an asthmatic boarding school student from Kaiserslautern and declared that the boy was not entitled to be exempted from attending classes and to have recourse to distance learning because of the coronavirus pandemic. A "certain risk of infection with the novel coronavirus" was currently "part of the general life risk for the entire population," the court declared, referring to "the case-law of the Federal Constitutional Court."

With a 7-day incidence of more than 120 cases per 100,000 inhabitants, there are now 15 districts in the worst-affected areas, including, as before, the Berchtesgadener district, the city districts of Delmenhorst, Berlin Neukölln and Mitte and the district of Sankt Wendel. But as news weekly *Der Spiegel* reports, even these ominous figures from the districts could be far below the actual case numbers.

According to the newsmagazine, the RKI has "in many cases given the central number of the pandemic ... incorrectly." "At least 30 percent of all 7-day incidences published by the Institute between August 31 and October 12 were incomplete and therefore incorrect. The data of at least one day was completely missing."

The Institute thus provided "a distorted picture of the infection situation in Germany." Sometimes, according to the RKI, a place "bobs below the 50 mark for weeks, although in reality, it has long since passed it." For example, on Oct. 8, the RKI reported an incidence in the district of Cloppenburg in which "almost three-quarters of the infections were missing."

According to *Der Spiegel*, the 7-day incidence is on average "ten percent too low" nationwide—a frightening difference since each individual case is a multiplier of the exponential spread of the pandemic. In Hamburg, the figures were always 25 percent too low, in Saxony 19 percent too low. Under these conditions, a comparison of districts across federal state borders is "hardly possible," concludes *Der Spiegel*. In other words, it may not be possible to determine in time whether a district is developing into a European hotspot.

As the RKI itself states, the currently reported death figures are misleadingly low, although these figures also suggest the beginning of an exponentially rising trend. The RKI report cites as "reasons" for the current pattern of deaths the still low average age of those infected, on the one hand, and the government's "broad testing strategy," which "increasingly includes mild cases as well."

Susanne Johna, the chairwoman of the doctors' association Marburger Bund, noted on the *Maybrit Illner* talk show that in the course of the so-called "ban on staying in accommodation away from home"—which Chancellor Angela Merkel and the state premiers had fought over in negotiations lasting several hours—people are being tested who have no symptoms. In this way, tests were being "wasted that we need elsewhere." This means that the official numbers of infections are also rising less than the real level of infections because testing resources have not been sufficiently expanded.



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