

# In face of rising coronavirus infections, teachers, students, and parents express support for European-wide school strike

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Hospital bed shortages, overloaded test laboratories and health authorities that can no longer reliably track contacts are threatened everywhere. As throughout Europe, the ruling class's herd immunity policy has set the course for an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe in Germany. On Friday, the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) reported over 21,500 new coronavirus infections in the previous 24 hours—another record figure.

The importance of schools and day-care centres as breeding grounds for the virus has long been comprehensively documented scientifically. Just two weeks ago, researchers from the University of Edinburgh demonstrated that opening up schools had been accompanied by a 24 percent increase in the transmission of infections within a month. The study analyses data sets from 131 countries and was published in the *Lancet Infectious Diseases* journal.

Although the health authorities are completely overloaded, and three-quarters of infection cases cannot be traced due to the German government's "testing strategy," schools and day-care centres were themselves among the relevant "infection environments," according to official reports. Current data from the health authorities show at least 11 percent of traceable chains of infection begin in educational institutions.

Inquiries by *tagesschau.de* have brought to light menacing figures from several German states. For example, when asked, Rhineland-Palatinate reported that the number of infected schoolchildren in the state had increased more than fivefold in the past week. The number of affected teachers had also multiplied: from 16 to 71. Four hundred eighty-five infected pupils were registered in Lower Saxony in the weeks from October 12, followed by 686—and in the week from October 26, there were as many as 1,255 cases. In the current week, there were 366 cases from Monday to Tuesday morning alone.

In Bavaria, according to a report by *tagesschau.de*, more than 2,000 pupils were infected on October 30, the last day of school before the autumn vacations. In Hamburg, almost one in four current cases relates to a school context.

The COVID-19 research team at Johns Hopkins University even reported a new infection rate of 31,480 and 232 deaths

Thursday in Germany, warning of another exponential increase.

Workers and young people are reacting with consternation and anger to the murderous decision of the federal and state governments to keep schools, businesses, and day-care centres open. Given the "almost 20,000 new infections," Christine D. from Karlsruhe, for example, commented on Facebook, "It won't be long before hospitals are overwhelmed. Schools should be closed immediately because infections will only go down after weeks. I'm afraid that we'll wait too long and then feel the same as everyone else in Europe. There were 500 coronavirus deaths in the UK alone yesterday."

*Deutsche Presseagentur* reports that more and more laboratories are reaching their limits in evaluating tests. According to the RKI, 69 laboratories reported a backlog of 98,931 samples still to be processed in the past calendar week (up to November 1). Two weeks earlier, there were 52 laboratories with 20,799 outstanding unprocessed samples. According to the RKI, 55 laboratories recently reported delivery problems for reagents needed for evaluating the tests, plastic consumables, and pipette tips, among other things.

Because of backlogs in the laboratories, residents of old people's homes were having to wait up to five days for test results, the German Foundation for Patient Protection warned the press on Tuesday. At the same time, according to board member Eugen Brysch, there was a demand "that overstretched laboratories must deliver results several times a week to keep the Bundesliga [football league] going." This policy was "unacceptable."

As is widely known, this completely predictable overload means the infection process can no longer be reliably monitored and is increasingly out of control. Christine continues on Facebook, "Due to congestion in the laboratories, 100,000 tests have not yet been evaluated—so who knows how high the numbers really are? We could already be at 30,000 or more new infections without knowing it. The only certainty is that it's increasing."

Meanwhile, the rate of positive coronavirus tests in Germany has increased more than tenfold from 0.7 to 7.3 in the past two months. In some regions of Austria, one in six tests is now

positive. According to WHO Regional Director Hans Kluge, the mortality rate of infected persons is also increasing in Europe. Kluge spoke to the press in Copenhagen on Thursday about an “explosion” in case numbers across the continent, which had once again become the global epicentre of the pandemic with 293,000 deaths.

Throughout Europe, massive resistance is developing against the herd immunity policy and the associated enforced keeping of schools open. After mass movements for safe education by students in Greece and Poland a few weeks ago, thousands of young people took to the streets in France on Wednesday. At more than a dozen schools, they protested for school closures and blocked school entrances. The Macron government reacted with massive violence and sent riot police to deal with the student protests, using truncheons and tear gas.

On Twitter, Tatjana, from Bavaria, who has four children herself, commented on the pictures on the Internet, “I am extremely disgusted by what is going on here in Europe and how children, parents, teachers, educators who are afraid are being treated. Not even violence seems to scare them away. I am speechless with outrage.”

In the last week, students in several German states have set up action committees to coordinate the coming struggles in this country as well. Like Britain, where over a thousand parents took part in a coordinated school strike action, more and more parents in Germany support the fight for safe education for all.

“Children and teenagers are to be sent to schools come hell or high water,” said Anita, a mother from southern Germany. “Collateral damage must simply be accepted,” she adds bitterly. “Protect patients at risk? Certainly not inside families.”

“My daughter is in eleventh grade, sits in packed trains and buses every day and can’t maintain [a safe] distance,” says Ulrike from Mönchengladbach on Facebook. “At school, she is then in a class with 30 students. She would be happy if there were online lessons and she didn’t have to expose herself to this risk every day. There are already dozens of students who have fallen ill and yet students must still go to school—I wonder what else has to happen to protect students. In many cases, father, mother, or siblings are high-risk individuals. Does it make no difference if our children become sick or carriers?”

In addition to parents, hundreds of teachers in France joined the students’ struggle in nationwide strikes. On Monday and Tuesday, shortly before 9 am, teachers held local meetings in dozens of schools and voted not to enter classrooms until measures were in place to contain the spread of the virus.

“In France, parents and teachers are on strike—rightly so, because their lives are at stake,” says Teja H. from Soest, who works as a photographer and has a girlfriend in France. “What the teachers are doing is the only right thing. While restaurants and cultural institutions are closed without any significant support, millions of people continue to meet at work and school.”

This policy is “madness, especially for at-risk people in

families.” Given the increase in eugenicist positions in the media and official politics, he adds, “This is how the pension system is being restructured. It is only a matter of guaranteeing production and profits, which is why the schools remain open in our country.”

Pictures from French schools, which show dozens of young people in rundown classrooms without infection protection, are also meeting with a big response among teachers in Germany.

“It’s the same at our schools,” writes Gabriele, a teacher from Frankfurt, on Facebook. “Every day, we are in small classrooms with thirty children without safe distancing—and I am a high-risk person!” In Germany and other countries, too, a strike by teachers must be organized, she says, but media coverage gives the impression that teachers have “no support in society” for such a programme of action.

The significance of this propaganda campaign—which goes hand in hand with a targeted trivialization of the virus—is confirmed by Gabriele’s colleague Anja. She writes in a comment for the *World Socialist Web Site* :

“It is really unbelievable that the risk—which is currently serious in my school—is being ridiculed and trivialized in such a way. Teaching with thirty students is simply not sustainable because infection pathways can’t be traced. Wherever infections can be prevented—for example, by attending classroom and home-schooling alternately on a daily basis—this should and must be done. There were solutions even before the vacations—and they worked. But this level [of infection prevention measures] is simply not being activated, even though it is long overdue given the current number of cases.

“Employers must provide protective clothing, must take protective measures using [air] filters,” says teacher Anja. “But nothing happens. In our case, the college has now been hit because we couldn’t protect ourselves. Students from different classes were hit with positive cases. The remaining students in classes were neither sent into quarantine nor were tests ordered. After more than a week, several classes are now in quarantine—much too late. Several teachers now have symptoms. The infection occurred after teaching in the affected classes. The affected colleagues were not even informed about the infection of the students at that time.”

International Youth and Students for Social Equality (Germany) is holding an online meeting on Monday 9 November to discuss the need for a European-wide school strike and the importance of a socialist perspective. Register for the event on Facebook and take part live at 7pm CET using this link !



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