

Coronavirus infections in Germany hit a new record

Markus Salzmann
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The number of reported new coronavirus infections in Germany reached a record level on Saturday with 23,399 cases, according to the Robert Koch Institute (RKI). The previous record of the day before was exceeded again by about 2,000 cases. The number of fatalities rose by 130 and now stands at 11,226.

The situation in hospitals, and especially in intensive care units, is becoming more dramatic day by day. As of Saturday, 2,839 patients were receiving intensive medical care. Exactly one month earlier, the figure had been 470. According to the German Interdisciplinary Association for Intensive Care (DIVI) register, the number of patients requiring ventilation rose from 233 to 1,534 during the same period.

Doctors assume that intensive care bed capacity will be exhausted by the beginning of next month, at the latest. A concrete forecast is difficult to make, as many beds are reported as available, but there are no staff available to manage them. On average, five nurses are needed per intensive care bed.

The German Foundation for Patient Protection has expressed doubts that the correct number of available beds is being reported by hospitals. It is feared that hospitals report an appreciable number of beds as available, for which no nursing staff are available, reported *Tagesschau*.

A total of 642,488 infections have now been registered in Germany. At the end of September, Chancellor Angela Merkel (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) had warned that there could be 19,200 new infections per day by Christmas. This figure was already exceeded in October. Most recently, Merkel had to warn of a collapse of intensive care bed provision in Germany given the latest infection figures.

Laboratories are now increasingly overloaded with test evaluations. The RKI had reported a backlog of

around 99,000 samples in 69 laboratories by November 1; two weeks earlier, it was around 21,000 in 52 laboratories. According to the RKI, an increasing number of laboratories reported they had reached the limits of their capacity in recent weeks.

This development was predictable and avoidable. All scientific forecasts and the experiences in other countries pointed to it. However, the federal and state governments made a conscious decision not to take effective measures. They did not impose a necessary lockdown, but only highly inconsistent and insufficient contact restrictions. Schools and daycare centres remain open so that production can continue in the factories.

In practice, this equates to the inhuman policy of “herd immunity,” which gives free rein to the virus in the hope that the population will eventually become immune. In Sweden, where herd immunity was official government policy, it led to a mortality rate nine times higher than in neighbouring Finland. Nevertheless, this policy has been adopted by Germany’s grand coalition of the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats (SPD) and all European governments.

The infection figures show how ineffective the current mild restrictions are. Despite the lockdown in Germany, a clear reversal of the trend is not yet in sight, as the RKI also noted in its report on Thursday. A further increase in community transmissions has been observed; the spread of the disease is diffuse, and the infection chains cannot be traced.

The situation is particularly tense in the capital. For the first time, Berlin is registering more than 15,000 active coronavirus cases. There were 697 new infections on Saturday alone, with two more deaths being added. Health Senator (State Minister) Dilek Kalayci (SPD), who is responsible for the disastrous pandemic policy of the Berlin Senate (State

Legislature), is currently in quarantine.

To distract from his policies, Berlin's governing mayor Michael Müller (SPD) called for a "month of personal responsibility." He aims to blame the population for the rising number of infections, an effort which received the support of the Greens.

The Left Party even attacks the inadequate measures implemented by the Senate and speaks out against any restrictions being placed on the ability of big business to ensure the flow of profits. Last month, Left Party chairwoman in Berlin Katina Schubert openly opposed placing further restrictions on contacts. "Berlin must look at what is important for Berlin, just as Thuringia, for example, takes it upon itself to do. We don't have to go along with everything," Schubert told the media.

Schubert thus made clear that the positions of Thuringia's State Premier Bodo Ramelow are widespread in the Left Party. Ramelow publicly praised the "Swedish model" and advocates herd immunity, i.e., the murderous infection of the population with the coronavirus.

In practice, Berlin's SPD-Left Party-Green Senate advocates this policy of contagion as well as the grand coalition at federal level. The Senate Administration for Education published new figures on Friday on the number of infections in Berlin schools. Since last week, the number of cases has almost doubled, as the *Berliner Zeitung* reported. The number rose from 408 to 744 students and from 157 to 221 school staff members. Above all, the number of closed learning groups has reached an absolute peak of 326, the paper reports. At the end of October, it was 22 groups. In vocational schools, 207 students and 15 teachers tested positive.

The districts of Neukölln and Tempelhof-Schöneberg have each recorded 105 pupils proven to be infected. The COVID-19 infections are similarly high in Mitte, Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg and Reinickendorf. More and more students, parents and teachers are calling for regular operations in schools and learning establishments to be stopped, as there is no longer any protection against infection.

In doing so, they face all the parties in the Senate and the trade unions, which, with their usual ignorance and unscrupulousness, want to enforce regular classes. Only now, after the infection figures have exploded, is the GEW education union quietly demanding that some lessons be held online.

Even this proposal goes too far for the SPD, the Greens and the Left Party. A spokesperson for the education administration declared that the current situation in schools was by no means such that personal attendance at classes should be suspended. Schools were not hotspots, he said.

It is not only the obvious statistics from Berlin that prove this statement wrong, studies clearly show that children and adolescents are "key players" in spreading the virus and are "very efficient transmitters." Stopping regular lessons at schools and closing daycare centres would be an effective way to stem the spread of the virus.

As throughout Germany, Berlin's health authorities are completely overwhelmed by the situation. According to Public Health Officer Patrick Larscheid from the Berlin-Reinickendorf health department, many coronavirus infections ultimately remain undetected. "We are already seeing quite a lot of the iceberg: But I estimate that about four-fifths will remain under the water. That means: For every case we see, we don't see about four cases."

Due to the situation, the health authorities were no longer able to rapidly devote a lot of effort to every single case, Health Senator Kalayci said on Friday. After the establishment parties in Berlin, above all the SPD and Left Party, have enforced stringent cutbacks over the last decades, the public health bodies have broken down and are now unable to deal with the situation.

This is why, following an online conference with district health officials, Kalayci is now insisting those infected and their contacts take more "personal responsibility." At the same time, she said possible infected contacts that did not belong to a risk group were not promptly being followed up. There, it will "take some time," she said, knowing full well that this, in turn, can lead to numerous more infections and deaths.



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