

Herd immunity policy in German schools leads to explosion of coronavirus infections

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The number of people infected with coronavirus in Germany continues to rise steadily, with more people being taken into hospital, intensive care units and needing ventilators every day. On Friday, the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) registered 23,542 COVID-19 infections in 24 hours, an all-time high. Over 600 new patients were admitted to intensive care units and another 218 patients died from the virus.

This week, pharmaceutical companies Pfizer and BioNTech announced news of a possible breakthrough in the search for a COVID-19 vaccine. Other clinical studies also confirm that it may soon be technically possible to provide the world's population with a vaccine against Sars-CoV-2. A possible end to the pandemic is thus within reach. And yet capitalist politicians refuse to do everything possible to protect the population.

They continue to insist that it is necessary to “live with the virus,” maintaining their de facto herd immunity policy. This is especially true in the federal state of Hesse and the cities of Offenbach and Frankfurt am Main. Both districts have unusually high case numbers. Offenbach, in Hesse, has the highest seven-day incidence rate—317 infected persons per 100,000 inhabitants—and Frankfurt follows in second place with an incidence rate of 273.2.

It is no coincidence that it is precisely in these two cities that the most elementary World Health Organization requirements for controlling the pandemic—testing, isolation and contact tracing—are blatantly disregarded. To keep schools, day-care centres and businesses open at all costs, the politicians responsible in Frankfurt and Offenbach have decided to quarantine only those students who have tested positive at school. If a student is proven to be infected, neither the student's classmates nor teachers are sent home or even tested. This was confirmed by both health authorities following a query by the *Hessenschau*.

The case of a schoolgirl in Offenbach reported by the

Hessenschau and broadcaster ARD brings to light the full extent of the criminal negligence involved. Schoolgirl Mara, whose classmate tested positive for coronavirus, sat in the classroom behind the sick girl. Nevertheless, she continued attending school untested. Her mother then organized her own test—and lo and behold, Mara was also positive. “If I had stayed in school,” the girl commented, “I would have spent more time with my classmates and friends, who might have become infected.”

To keep the numbers low and schools open, those responsible insist on this irresponsible policy and resort to long disproved fake news as justification.

“There is no reason at all to close schools,” René Gottschalk, head of the Frankfurt Health Department, claimed in an interview with the *Frankfurter Rundschau*. Regarding the lockdown in March, he adds untruthfully, “This decision had hardly contributed to the fact that the numbers had already fallen in the spring.” And the earth is flat, one might add!

The view that schools are not the drivers of the pandemic has been clearly refuted by science. Only recently, a group of leading Austrian scientists again proved that the closure of schools during the spring lockdown was “certainly a significant contribution” and “one of the most effective individual measures ever.” They pointedly write, “All those who are now speaking out against school closures must state that they are in favour of triage”—in other words, treating some patients and letting others die.

Asked about the situation in schools, Charité virologist Christian Drosten also confirmed again on Tuesday in an NDR podcast, “We have repeated so often: school classes contribute to the spread [of COVID-19] as much as anyone else.” What was needed is a consensus that “we need to reduce contacts throughout society,” he said. Responding to the dogged claim that children are not the drivers of the pandemic, and less happens in schools than

in the rest of society, Drosten repeated, “The virus does not care who it affects, and that includes children.”

He explained in detail once again that an infected person is contagious several days before the onset of symptoms, and that it is therefore urgently necessary to locate and test contact persons, “because they are particularly at risk of developing new cases and passing on the virus.”

Drosten also confirmed that considerably more people than known about may already have been infected. Since the federal and state governments deliberately refrained from systematically stepping up the relevant capacities and health authority resources in the summer, the test sites and laboratories were extremely overloaded, and many health authorities had already discontinued systematic contact tracing.

“We know that laboratory capacity and tracing are both overloaded at present,” Drosten said. Everyone was noticing that it is not so easy to get a test. “It could also be that we have a kind of decoupling between the occurrence of infection and the detection process. This means that we do not notice what is actually going on in the population.”

In the meantime, parents and teachers are reacting increasingly anxiously and angrily to the inhumane school and coronavirus policy.

In the Facebook group “Teachers of all subjects and school forms, unite!” Mara’s mother writes about her experience that schools are classifying KP2 [a lower contact rating] contact persons as “coronavirus-free” from the outset. “No! We have experienced it, and so have many others. Infected at school, wrongly rated as KP2 and later tested POSITIVE for coronavirus. My daughter got infected in this way. Fully occupied classes are an enormous risk, and the virus does not stop there either. There should be more publicity ... Also speaking for teachers, who have to submit to all this and have to structure and organize things again and again—what chaos for all concerned!”

Others confirm that this has “been the case here for four weeks now” and that the same is also being done in Frankfurt. Anja reports, “Half the college is in quarantine, but nothing has happened. It’s covered over and covered over. Full classes, [wearing] masks over 7 hours, no distancing possible. It is a tragedy.”

Melanie writes, “Keep the school open come hell or high water—but why?”—“Numbers,” answers Anja. “I was told via the grapevine that the numbers should be kept low to avoid school closures.” [Frankfurt] Mayor Roland [Koch] says, “Leave schools ‘operating normally,’ but

allow coronavirus denial demos and ban St. Martins processions for the children—that doesn’t compute!”

The *World Socialist Web Site* has been explaining for months that opening up schools is part of the concept of keeping capitalist businesses running and that the politicians who do not want to jeopardize big business profits are walking over dead bodies in the process. The IYSSE, the youth organization of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party), calls for a European-wide school strike against the herd immunity policy and for the establishment of independent action committees in schools and factories, independent of the bourgeois parties and trade unions, to fight for effective pandemic protection.

After opening up schools under unsafe conditions, the establishment politicians are refusing to close them again despite mass infections, to make sure parents can go to work. In the Hesse state legislature, where the Social Democrats (SPD) and Left Party are in opposition, they reacted to the discontent of students and teachers in a debate on Thursday by merely demanding that school classes be divided up until Christmas.

Meanwhile, the Greens, who sit in the Hesse state executive along with the Christian Democrats (CDU), took it upon themselves to vehemently defend the opening of schools by CDU Culture Minister Alexander Lorz. Green Member of Parliament Daniel May gave express thanks for the fact that “school reality” had been established since the summer vacations and “that we can realize the educational mission.” He praised the state government’s measures and called for schools to be kept open for as long as possible. “Better to put on a mask than close schools,” he added cynically.



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