

Coronavirus spreads throughout Germany's schools and businesses

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The coronavirus pandemic is increasingly running out of control in Germany. The federal and state governments are responsible for this situation. Laboratories and health authorities are overloaded because testing capacities have not been expanded and investment in protective measures have been refused.

Although hundreds of people are dying every day, those showing no symptoms are no longer being tested. Outbreaks at factories and schools are being covered up, and medical professionals who raise criticisms warning of the strain and mass deaths are ignored.

On Friday, the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) reported 23,542 new infections—a new peak, following that of the day before. Since the end of September, the number of fatalities in Germany has doubled every one to two weeks. By Wednesday evening last week, the health authorities had already reported more deaths (848) than in the entire previous week (822), in which the number had doubled since the last week of October.

According to the RKI, there are now 269 city or rural districts with an incidence of over 100 cases per 100,000 inhabitants, which corresponds to what was described as a “hotspot” at the beginning of the pandemic. On a map produced by the RKI, 16 of these districts are depicted in the darkest red, i.e., they show an incidence of over 250 cases per 100,000 inhabitants.

With the beginning of the influenza season, the report also warns of rapidly increasing cases of “severe acute respiratory infections (SARI).” Half of SARI cases were hospitalized with a COVID-19 diagnosis in the week from October 26 to November 1, significantly more than four weeks before. The “number of SARI cases in the age groups 35 years and older ... was at a significantly higher level than in previous years.” The “main diagnoses” of SARI cases include “influenza, pneumonia or other acute infections of the lower respiratory tract.”

According to the German Interdisciplinary Association

for Intensive and Emergency Medicine (DIVI), more than 95 percent of all intensive care beds are now occupied in 13 city and district hospitals. In the districts of Lüchow-Dannenberg and Wittmund (Lower Saxony), Oberspreewald-Lausitz (Brandenburg), Südliche Weinstrasse (Rhineland-Palatinate), Karlsruhe, Rastatt and Hohenlohekreis (Baden-Württemberg), as well as the five Bavarian districts of Augsburg, Kitzingen, Dachau, Erlangen-Höchstadt, Weißenburg-Gunzenhausen and Altötting, no regular intensive care beds are available at all.

Given the time delay of several days between infections and admissions, there can be no doubt that the situation will worsen many times over nationwide in the coming days.

Increasingly, medical staff with other specializations must also be called in. “From Monday, trauma surgeons will be working in the coronavirus intensive care unit,” a trauma surgeon and emergency physician reports on Twitter. Against this background, Federal Health Minister Jens Spahn confirmed Friday at a press conference that in case of doubt, doctors and nurses infected with the coronavirus will also have to continue working. In the spring this had led to overloaded hospitals becoming veritable death traps.

Offices and factories are also becoming coronavirus breeding grounds. This is shown particularly drastically by a mass outbreak in a factory of the automotive supplier ZF Friedrichshafen in Eiltorf (North Rhine-Westphalia). According to the *Bonner General-Anzeiger*, 91 employees have tested positive for the coronavirus. This means that two-thirds of the total number of infections in the town (currently 141 cases according to the district health office) are attributable to the company.

This case offers a devastating insight into the close collaboration between the corporations and public authorities when it comes to trivializing and covering up

outbreaks in companies and in pushing for regular operations to be resumed as quickly as possible, despite the danger to workers' lives.

Although the employees had already tested positive November 16, and the entire workforce was in "home quarantine" by order of the health department, production did not come to a standstill until November 19. As with previous mass outbreaks in the meatpacking industry, the concept of so-called "work quarantine" was applied to ensure that workers, while "isolated" from their fellow employees, could still generate profits. A district spokeswoman told the *General-Anzeiger* that workers "may leave their homes to go to work under protection ..."

On Thursday, a ZF Friedrichshafen spokeswoman announced that production would be suspended until Sunday, but at the same time claimed that there were "no signs" that "the coronavirus had spread at the ZF factory premises." The company wants to do everything in its power to "continue to reliably supply our customers with shock absorbers."

The *General-Anzeiger* also reports a "telephone conference in which [District Administrator] Schuster and [COVID Head of Department] Thomas, representatives of the health and legal authorities, the mayor of Eitorf, Rainer Viehof, as well as the plant and Group Management took part." The head of the "COVID office" also referred to the "room for manoeuvre in the implementation by the regulatory authorities." After all, this was "an international corporation" and an "important employer"—so it was necessary to "weigh up the pros and cons." Schuster concluded that one could "imagine that the plant would start up production again around noon [November 16]."

As the *World Socialist Web Site* explained at an early stage, the spread of the pandemic and the deaths of hundreds and thousands of people per day are the result of a deliberate policy.

The government is well aware that schools are one of the main drivers of the pandemic, along with businesses. As Social Democrat (SPD) Member of Parliament Karl Lauterbach said Friday on Twitter, "Unfortunately, the situation in schools is beyond our control. What we gain in restaurants and pubs, we lose in schools." The SPD is not only a member of the federal government but also governs in some of the most severely affected states and districts (including Berlin and Bremen with a 7-day incidence of 173 and 178 respectively).

In France, tens of thousands of teachers again took part

in strike action against the unsafe school system on Tuesday. Among pupils, teachers, parents and scientists, there are increasing calls demanding the closure of all schools.

On Friday, the student council of the Hugo-Kükelhaus-Berufskolleg (HKBK) in Essen addressed all students at secondary schools and vocational colleges in North Rhine-Westphalia on Twitter. "We demand education with responsibility," the appeal said. "We are afraid: Afraid to infect grandma and grandpa. Fear of infecting ourselves. Fear of losing people who mean a lot to us."

Teachers and students are "together day after day for hours in a confined space ..., without a ventilation system and without the possibility of maintaining sufficient distance." "All of Germany's incumbent education ministers," the appeal went on, had so far refused "to continue teaching in hybrid [alternating in-person and online lessons] classes in secondary schools and vocational colleges"—not to mention more far-reaching measures.

The students, therefore, conclude: "We as learners, but also teachers and school administrators are obviously not being heard." Therefore, they declare, "from Monday, November 16, 2020, for an indefinite period, we will go on hybrid strike and call on the country's secondary schools and vocational colleges via all social media channels available to us to do the same!"

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) calls on all students and teachers to form independent action committees to develop and coordinate their struggles internationally. The strikes and protests must be extended to the whole continent and made the starting point for a comprehensive general strike. Only by closing schools and stopping non-essential production can the herd immunity policy—allowing thousands to be deliberately infected—be stopped and a humanitarian catastrophe averted.



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