

More than 30,000 daily infections in Germany and war-like conditions in hospitals

Gregor Link

18 December 2020

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are becoming more dramatic every day in Germany. After a new record death toll of 952 was reported on Wednesday, the number of those infected also reached a new all-time high on Thursday, exceeding the 30,000 mark for the first time. Across Germany, the positive test rate is currently around 12 percent—more than double the value that epidemiologists cite as the threshold beyond which the infection incidence runs out of control.

Thursday, the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) announced just under 27,000 new infections, as well as reporting a further 3,500 cases from Baden-Württemberg, which had initially not been communicated “for technical reasons.” On Friday again more than 30,000 cases were reported. Compared to the previous week, the number of newly infected persons grew by 14 percent. According to Worldometer, another 767 people died of COVID-19 on Friday. This brought the number of coronavirus deaths in Germany to over 25,900. More than 1.46 million people have been infected with the virus since the outbreak of the pandemic.

The “80-plus age group” is particularly hard hit, accounting for 12.3 percent of infections. Reports of deadly mass outbreaks in old people’s homes are piling up from all over Germany, most recently in the district of Düren, where 30 cases of infection and two deaths were mourned after a St. Nicholas party.

“We know that the number of deaths and seriously ill people always lags about four to five weeks behind the infection figures,” World Medical Association President Frank Ulrich Montgomery told broadcaster n-tv yesterday. At the current death rate, this would mean between 30,000 and 35,000 additional deaths by mid-January. But the overloading of hospitals could lead to many more people dying: clinics all over Germany would have to decide who receives life-saving treatment and who does not, the physician said.

Conditions at German hospitals already resemble those in a war. Medical director Mathias Mengel from Saxony reported to news portal t-online that at Zittau hospital, several times in the past few days, “we had to decide who gets oxygen and who doesn’t.” Ingo Autenrieth, chief medical director of Heidelberg University Hospital, also told the press that nurses and doctors had “adjusted” to making such life-and-death decisions: “We haven’t experienced a situation like this in Heidelberg or anywhere else in Germany in the last 50, 60 years.”

Meanwhile, Germany’s leading university hospital, Berlin’s Charité, is considering transferring non-COVID patients to other

cities for the first time. Berlin alone—where state education minister Sandra Scheeres (Social Democrat, SPD) is pushing particularly hard for schools to return to regular operations as soon as possible—reported 1,473 new cases and 30 deaths Thursday, a 31 percent increase on the previous week.

Almost 30 percent of all intensive care patients in the capital are COVID-19 sufferers, who increasingly have to be treated with ECMO machines, which temporarily take over the work of the heart and lungs. To do this, thick tubes are inserted into the veins of the patient’s legs to artificially circulate the blood and enrich it with oxygen. Of the 35 specialist machines at the Charité, only three were still available on Monday, *Tagesspiegel* reported. The newspaper quotes a COVID ward doctor saying, “We don’t have a single free place here at the moment ... Nobody is placed on the artificial lung anymore just because they are seriously ill.” “Hopeless cases” could “simply no longer be treated.”

Given the impending overload, the Charité had already turned to university hospitals in Dresden, Leipzig and Magdeburg for help. “But they need help there themselves at the moment,” writes *Tagesspiegel*. “Since the East German university hospitals are not available, [Charité vice-chairman] Ulrich Frei has now made calls throughout a 400-kilometre radius.” The emergency transfer of severe non-COVID cases to Lübeck, Kiel, Hanover, and Göttingen is being discussed. At the beginning of the pandemic, Frei had declared the country was facing the “greatest medical challenge in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany.”

Throughout Germany, the virus is ravaging nursing homes. At the end of November, the state of Hesse reported that two-thirds of coronavirus deaths in the autumn were in nursing homes. The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* described a situation in Munich, where first staff, then more and more residents, tested positive in October. However, there was no separation of the infected and non-infected, so that the spread of the virus continued unhindered. A relative of an affected resident said decisions impacting life and death were “going on here before a doctor even gets involved.”

The Munich Health Council and Bavarian Ministry of Health reacted dismissively to an open letter to politicians and the authorities warning of the “potentially lethal danger” in the home. It was supposedly impossible to implement safe distance rules for dementia patients, they said.

After almost a year of the pandemic, there is still no proper supply of protective equipment for nursing homes. The federal government’s grandiose promise to supply homes with FFP2

protective masks has turned out to be a mockery. The Workers' Welfare Association (AWO) in western Westphalia has received 30,000 masks from the federal government, but they consider them medically unsuitable and therefore cannot use them in their homes.

The government, which brought about these conditions with its profits-before-lives policy, expects the situation to worsen many times over in the coming weeks and months. "The next three months will be by far the toughest months in the entire course of the pandemic," said Karl Lauterbach, the SPD's health policy spokesman, in an interview with the daily *Welt*. Chancellery Minister Helge Braun (Christian Democrat, CDU) also threatened that the population would face three "particularly difficult months." In the government's view, tens of thousands of deaths are inevitable. According to Lauterbach, the current measures were "the maximum we can decide at the moment."

How consciously the government prepared for mass deaths is glaringly evident in Hanau, Hesse. Mayor Claus Kaminsky (SPD) announced Thursday on Twitter that the city was using a "refrigerated container for coronavirus dead for the first time because the Hanau clinics are overloaded," It was "good that we took precautions for this very early on," Kaminsky said.

By "early precautions" the SPD politician does not mean taking timely measures to protect the population but making arrangements for the temporary storage of their bodies. According to a report in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the refrigerated container had been set up "as early as April."

Opposition is growing among the population to the murderous policy that brought about the disaster by keeping businesses and schools open for months. "If they had taken the right measures early on, they would not need a refrigerated container, which they are apparently still proud of. It's macabre. My sympathies go out to all the relatives," commented Twitter user Tigerlutz on Kaminsky's tweet.

U. Lancier writes, "early provisions made"—a bitter mockery for the relatives of the thousands who died too early. Early precautions would have been a hard lockdown after the end of the holiday season, with schools closed for at least three weeks. [What is being done now is] 'The wrong thing, too little, too late'."

Another adds, "A cynical statement and slap in the face of the relatives. Precaution would have been a timely lockdown and sensible schools' policy. Instead, this decision has been delayed and protection in schools prevented."

Numerous students, educators and parents express their anger that the federal and state governments continue to refuse to consistently shut schools and non-essential businesses.

"Day-care centres are still open in Berlin, not only for essential workers but also for parents who have a need. In my centre, several educators, children and parents are COVID-positive. I'm glad I've been able to keep my child out of it for months," Jesse, a teacher in Berlin, wrote on Twitter.

Franziska from Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania criticises the fact that the state government there, made up of the SPD and CDU, also refuses to consistently close day-care centres and schools. "The day-care centres are open normally. There are still many children going to school. I think they should have closed everything until January 10, including schools and day-care

centres. It's all useless like this," she writes in the Facebook group "School Strike."

Marie-Luise from Brandenburg/Oberhavel, who is active in the same group, writes: "We have an incidence of 177—and rising. Despite the abolition of compulsory attendance since Monday, schools and day-care centres are still full. Graduating classes and special schools have compulsory attendance." And Lisa M. explains, "In Potsdam, the incidence value is 193—yet the schools are full and the final year classes and special classes even have compulsory attendance. I'm so pissed off!"

Clemens from Munich, who is undertaking voluntary service in a day-care centre and is a member of the Action Committees for Safe Education network, told the WSWS, "The thousand coronavirus deaths per day are the tragic result of the criminal policies of the ruling class. The federal and state governments have known that it could come to this and have deliberately accepted it to be able to keep businesses open. To do that, they also had to keep schools and kindergartens open."

"There are 10 children again today" in his kindergarten group. "Our protection amounts to wearing masks all the time—until recently they were FFP2 masks, but they are all gone. Now we only have disposable masks, which we can't change regularly."

On the political tasks facing workers and youth in this situation, Clemens said, "Chancellor [Angela] Merkel and other government politicians have made clear they want to keep our facilities open at all costs. The price for this policy is thousands of deaths, to which more will be added if the working class does not take action and form rank-and-file committees everywhere and fight for their demands based on a socialist perspective."

The network of rank-and-file action committees initiated by the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) and the IYSSE is fighting to organise the growing opposition and prepare a European-wide general strike to close schools and non-essential workplaces. Their demands include "billions for safe and good quality education" and "full compensation for parents who have to care for their children."



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact