

# Germany's federal and state governments keep workplaces open despite surging COVID deaths

Marianne Arens  
5 January 2021

All serious virologists agree that to bring the pandemic under control, a complete Europe-wide lockdown is required to reduce infections to a fraction of their current level. But in spite of increasing deaths, political leaders remain unwilling to pursue this course. That was made clear by the conference between Germany's federal and state governments yesterday.

Chancellor Angela Merkel met with the minister presidents of Germany's 16 states once again via video conference. The result was a mere continuation of the existing inadequate measures until the end of January, combined with a few new restrictions that can only be described as cosmetic.

These include the restriction of free movement to a 15-kilometre radius around one's place of residency in regions with an incidence of over 200 infections per 100,000 inhabitants over the previous seven days. It is less than clear what such a measure will accomplish in large cities such as Berlin, Munich and Cologne.

To ensure the uninterrupted flow of profits, workplaces and production sites will be allowed to continue operating. Only hotels, restaurants, shopping centres, certain service providers, museums and cultural institutions will remain closed.

Even the option of working from home depends on the good will of the employer. The official conference agreement states: "Employers are urgently requested to create generous opportunities to work from home so as to implement the principle 'we stay at home' nationwide."

As a result, schools and childcare facilities will remain open. In order to keep production running, the large number of exemptions and emergency care offers in schools and childcare facilities will ensure that hundreds of thousands of teachers, children and young people are forced to attend in-person classes and take packed buses and trains to get there.

Classes began this week in the states of Berlin and Hamburg, which are governed by coalitions of the Social Democrats, Left Party and Greens, and Social Democrats and Greens, respectively. Even though infections are reaching record highs, education facilities are full.

In Hamburg, 700 infections were registered within 24 hours. Nonetheless, according to media reports, Hamburg day care

centres were "comparatively well attended for the start of the new year." Around one-third of day care-aged children and 20 percent of primary school children were present on Monday morning because their parents had to work.

In Berlin, the Senate informed parents in writing about emergency care options in day care centres and all but demanded that they send their children there. In its letter of 30 December, the Senate noted that it had not bothered to "compile specific lists of system-relevant occupations." It continued: "We explicitly advise that avoiding a loss of earnings represents an extraordinary need for care." In this way, parents and teachers are put under pressure to comply with the obligation to go to work.

Under these conditions, it comes as no surprise that teachers and childcare workers must be present in the education institutions each day, regardless of the coronavirus risk. Yet even nine months after the beginning of the pandemic, there is still a lack of FFP2 masks, air filtration devices, and mass rapid testing. The transition to online learning and smaller groups has also fallen well short of expectations, and there is a lack of equipment, technical expertise and teachers.

The sentence in the governments' agreement according to which "childcare facilities and schools have the greatest significance for children's education," is being transformed into its opposite. Schools and day care centres are being turned into mere holding pens, drivers of the pandemic, and centres of death.

Germany's education ministers already agreed on Monday that primary schools and childcare facilities should be the first to be opened fully, and that the so-called lockdown would not apply to older students in their final year. The chancellor's meeting with the minister presidents confirmed this on Tuesday.

The governments are continuing to pursue a policy of death to protect the profits of big business and the banks, and justifying this with long-exposed lies, such as the claim that younger children are not infectious. In Baden-Württemberg, Education Minister Susanne Eisenmann (Christian Democratic Union--CDU) categorically demanded that primary schools and

day care centres be open as of 11 January.

Amid all of this, coronavirus infections and deaths remain shockingly high. The Robert Koch Institute, Germany's federal agency for infectious diseases, reported close to 11,900 new infections and a further 944 deaths on Tuesday. The holiday period, during which the figures were somewhat lower due to some local health agencies not reporting new infections and fewer tests being conducted, is definitively over. Daily deaths are close to 1,000, which is the equivalent of two jumbo jets crashing every day.

More than 1,000 European scientists have signed the statement "Scientists demand a European strategy for a rapid and sustained reduction of COVID-19 cases," which appeared in the *Lancet* medical journal on 18 December. They call for a strict and coordinated Europe-wide lockdown.

On Saturday, 2 January, DIVI President Uwe Jansens, Professor Melanie Brinkmann from the Helmholtz Centre for Research on Infectious Diseases in Braunschweig, and Viola Priesemann, the head of a research group at the Max Planck Institute in Göttingen, elaborated on the statement in a webinar.

"We are not an island," said Viola Priesemann in justifying the call for a "real reset." It is urgently necessary to adopt Europe-wide coordinated measures against the pandemic. How high the numbers in one land are depends upon how high the figures are in all countries."

As is evident from social media, these demands enjoy broad based support among the population.

According to Dr. Priesemann, one can talk about "low case numbers" only when there are around 10 infections per 100,000 inhabitants over a seven-day period. With significantly higher rates of infections, local health agencies lose control and are no longer able to trace all contacts, test their periphery, and send each new case into isolation. The virus then spreads unhindered and exponentially. And this leads to the mutations seen in Britain, which are now spreading all across Europe.

But the chancellor and heads of state governments totally ignored this. In their agreement from 5 January, they write that the goal is "to reduce the seven-day incidence to below 50 cases per 100,000 inhabitants," a goal that cannot be achieved without the full closure of all nonessential businesses, schools and childcare facilities.

The current incidences are two, three and in some areas 20 times greater than this target. The current seven-day incidence for Germany as a whole is 135 per 100,000; three-quarters of Germany's 410 local districts have incidences of over 100, as the government itself acknowledges, and 70 have incidences above 200. The Vogtland district in Saxony has an incidence of 929 per 100,000 inhabitants, which means that over the past week, almost one percent of the population has been infected with the coronavirus.

Like every government across Europe, the Merkel government, together with the minister presidents and education ministers from the states, is ignoring all scientifically

grounded advice and pursuing the murderous policy of mass infection.

This is shown in the policy for vaccinations. The government boasts in the agreement, "With the mobilisation of all the forces of science and research, it has been possible to develop, test, and deploy vaccinations with good tolerability and high effectiveness in record time." However, the vaccination strategy is a prime example of the government's criminal neglect.

The vaccination programme began on 27 December, and the Robert Koch Institute reports that only 265,000 people were vaccinated during the first week, less than 40,000 per day. The vaccine is in short supply everywhere, and the large vaccine centres unveiled with great fanfare in halls, airports and sports centres cannot operate at full capacity. Many doctors and nurses who volunteered have complained that they have had nothing to do.

If an adequate supply of vaccines was available, it would be possible to immunise up to 60 percent of the population. However, it is already clear that the government failed to order enough vaccines. This is not only true of Germany, but of the entire European Union.

Even the government-aligned National Academy of Sciences, the "Leopoldina," sharply criticised Merkel and federal Health Minister Jens Spahn. "Recently there were still official commemorations for the dead," Leopoldina employee Frauke Zipp told *Die Welt* newspaper. "Now, apparently, every day that lives could be saved does not count." If the vaccine strategy is to succeed, it must be implemented swiftly to ensure that new mutations of the virus do not undermine it, she added.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)**