

# Germany leads Europe in daily coronavirus deaths

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On Friday morning, the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) reported 1,188 new deaths within 24 hours. This figure is higher than the previous German record set on Dec. 30, when 1,129 people died from the pandemic in one day. Also, more than a thousand deaths were reported on Wednesday (1,019) and Thursday (1,070). According to Worldometers, over 39,000 people have died so far in Germany.

In fact, the real total is likely to be much higher. The RKI warns that it has received only incomplete figures for COVID-19 infections and deaths due to the Christmas and New Year holidays. Worldometers, which relies on other sources, reported as many as 1,198 deaths on Wednesday morning. Even the UK, where infection numbers are going through the roof, currently has fewer victims than Germany. Worldometers registered 830 deaths in the UK on Tuesday and 981 on December 30. However, these numbers are also likely to rise again soon.

How did it get to this situation?

In the first months of the pandemic, Germany seemed to come through the crisis somewhat better than its neighbours. In light of the catastrophic situation in Italy, the German government took initial protective measures relatively early. However, neither the federal nor state governments were prepared to protect the population against the danger of infection, although they were fully aware of the risks. The interests of the economy, i.e., the profits of major corporations and banks, always took precedence over people's lives.

This was already evident in March, when the government approved a €756 billion emergency package, €600 billion of which went to large corporations, with only pittances for workers, the self-employed and small businesses. This measure, combined with the trillions pumped into financial markets by the European Central Bank, has seen share markets climb from one record level to another in the midst of the deepest health, social and economic crisis the country has seen. As coffins pile up in morgues, champagne corks are popping on the stock markets.

Since then, the government's main focus has been on keeping the economy running in order to recoup the billions it handed out to the rich, irrespective of the deadly consequences for workers. The closure of nonessential businesses was not even considered, even though it would have greatly reduced the risk of contagion not only in the businesses themselves, but also in crowded public transportation systems. Only service establishments with high levels of public traffic—restaurants, department stores, hair salons

and the like—were temporarily closed.

A prerequisite for continued production was keeping schools open so that parents could continue to work. The same politicians who for years had systematically run the education system into the ground now shed crocodile tears over the lack of educational opportunities for poor children as the schools were turned into custodial centres and hotbeds of infection.

A small fraction of the billions handed out to the rich would have been enough to make schools safer, as well as to purchase the necessary electronic equipment and hire enough tutors to ensure quality home schooling under the guidance of experienced teachers. But there was no money for this. All initiatives by teachers, parents and students to this end were systematically stifled.

The public was consistently lied to. Although it was known at an early stage that children and adolescents show fewer symptoms, but spread the virus just as rapidly as adults, politicians, journalists and even some scientists stubbornly claimed that children posed no danger and could even act as a countermeasure to the spread of the virus. In the meantime, numerous scientific studies have refuted this lie, which nevertheless continues to be spread.

At the end of December, the journal *Science* published a study by an international team from the University of Oxford that used infection data from 41 predominantly European countries to calculate the effectiveness of anti-coronavirus measures during the first wave of infection. The study concluded that the closure of schools and universities and the limiting of personal contact to a maximum of 10 people could reduce the number of replications of the virus by up to 40 percent. Closing nonessential stores, restaurants and pubs reduced the reproduction rate by 25 percent, while additional restrictions only reduced it by a maximum of 10 percent.

The internationally renowned Berlin virologist Christian Drosten also maintains that open schools are a major driver of the pandemic. In his latest podcast, he explains that the highly contagious mutation of the virus first discovered in England was most likely spread through schools. The new mutation of the virus took off “with a lot of tailwinds in schools” and then “spread to the rest of the population.”

More than a thousand European scientists have signed the appeal, “Calling for Pan-European commitment for rapid and sustained reduction in SARS-CoV-2 infections,” which advocates a radical, Europe-wide lockdown to bring the seven-day incidence

(the number of infections per 100,000 population in a week) below 10 to save hundreds of thousands of lives. German signatories include RKI President Lothar Wieler, Max Planck President Martin Stratmann, German National Academy President Gerald Haug, virologists Sandra Ciesek and Christian Drosten, and the presidents of several research organisations.

Yet governments and their advisers in industry continue to treat these scientific recommendations with contempt. They are literally willing to walk over dead bodies. On Tuesday, a conference call between the chancellor and the heads of government of the German states decided to merely extend the completely inadequate measures introduced in December until the end of January. Production in the factories continues unrestricted. Schools and day-care centres remain officially closed, but with so many exceptions that they continue to operate virtually unrestricted.

Even the modest measures intended to ease the conditions of parents turn out on closer inspection to be a sham. For example, government leaders have promised that parents with children up to 12 years will each get 10 days and single parents 20 days of extra paid leave to care for their children.

This pay, however, amounts to just 67 percent of net pay and is only provided if there is no other reasonable care option for the children. A reasonable care option is considered to be when one parent works in a home office. If day-care centres offer emergency care, parents are obliged to accept this option and thereby expose their children and themselves to the risk of infection.

Meanwhile, the campaign to fully open day-care centres and schools as soon as possible is gathering momentum in political circles and in the media, regardless of the risks involved.

Speaking on Deutschlandfunk radio on Wednesday, German Family Minister Franziska Giffey (Social Democratic Party, SPD) called for the quickest possible return to schools and day-care centres. The current restrictions are in place until the end of January, “and I think it must stay that way,” she said. When a relaxation of the lockdown was possible, then the children in day-care centres and schools are the first priority.

The premier for the state of Baden-Württemberg, Winfried Kretschmann (Green Party), announced that elementary schools and day-care centres would be fully reopened as early as January 18. He was supported by his Education Minister Susanne Eisenmann (Christian Democratic Union), who has been a vehement advocate of in-person teaching in elementary schools during the pandemic.

ARD’s Tuesday *Tagesthemen* news program featured an extensive interview with epidemiologist Klaus Stöhr who proceeded to attack all those scientists who advocate a radical lockdown. Stöhr argued against lowering the seven-day incidence below 120. He said recent weeks have shown “that 120 to 130 cases per 100,000 could be managed.” Hospitals everywhere had not been overloaded, he claimed, and the economic impact of such lockdowns was “undoubtedly significant.”

Stöhr was not chosen at random. He spent years working for Novartis, the Swiss pharmaceutical giant that profits billions off people’s health. In 2019, Novartis posted net income of \$11.7 billion on sales of \$47.4 billion. As recently as mid-October, Stöhr had defended the murderous strategy of herd immunity in the

weekly *Die Zeit*, recommending Sweden as a role model, although the disastrous consequences of the Swedish policy were already known at the time. With a seven-day incidence of 400, the country now ranks among the worst affected European countries.

On December 22, Stöhr called the pandemic development a “natural event” that was “unstoppable.” He recommended that the reproduction number, i.e., the infection rate, should not be higher than 1, “but also not much lower.” He said he thought it was “unreasonable to close schools and kindergartens when you know the main impact [is] on the elderly.” He criticised the measures taken in the summer, arguing that if they had not been introduced, there would now be many more young people who are no longer infectious.

This murderous policy of herd immunity, which cold-bloodedly accepts the death of tens of thousands, is the policy of the entire ruling class. It is supported by all parties represented in the Bundestag and put into practice in the states by political coalitions of all stripes. The Left Party, the Greens and the SPD are no less ruthless than the Free Democratic Party, the CDU and the CSU (Christian Social Union).

As in the case of refugee policy, it is the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) which acts as pioneer. The demonstrations against coronavirus restrictions supported by the AfD provide an excuse for all the other parties to move further and further to the right.

Resistance to the policy of open schools and day-care centres is growing among parents, teachers and students, but to successfully fight against it they need an independent perspective.

The crucial task is to build a cohesive network of independent action committees to guarantee safety and health. These action committees must fight to unite all workers—teachers, school bus drivers, janitors, as well as manufacturing, health care, logistics, retail and food processing workers—in a nationwide general strike to halt regular school operations and production in nonessential businesses.

Join the Action Committees for Safe Education and join the Socialist Equality Party, which fights for a socialist program and the international unity of the working class.



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