

School and day-care centre openings in Germany—a murderous herd immunity experiment

Gregor Link
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Restrictions on face-to-face teaching and the impact of the Christmas and winter holidays led to a substantial drop in new infections and deaths in recent weeks, proving once again the central role that schools and day-care centres have played in the COVID-19 pandemic.

This impressively underscores the urgent need for a European-wide school and general strike to defeat the pandemic and prevent the avoidable deaths of hundreds of thousands of people. In Germany alone, COVID-19 continues to claim an average of 400 lives every day, and across Europe 4,000 deaths are daily added to the grim toll.

The spread of the original coronavirus strain is being eclipsed in more and more European countries by more contagious variants, which are now also increasingly being detected in mass outbreaks in Germany. According to the Robert Koch Institute (RKI), the proportion of the UK variant of new cases rose to more than 20 percent within 14 days.

Given the proliferation of variants, virologists Melanie Brinkmann and Christian Drosten recently warned in the newsweekly *Der Spiegel* that a comprehensive policy of opening up the economy would immediately cost the lives of 100,000 to 180,000 more people in Germany alone.

But instead of keeping schools and day-care centres closed, scaling down the economy to absolutely essential levels and containing the pandemic with measures coordinated across Europe—a goal supported by more than 1,000 leading scientists—the federal and state governments are systematically seeking to create conditions for a third wave. Nowhere is this more evident than in the attempt by state leaders to return to unprotected face-to-face teaching as soon as possible.

In **Saxony**, where the crematoriums were overwhelmed in the face of mass deaths just a few weeks ago, primary schools and day-care centres have already been back in “restricted regular operation” since Monday—without distancing rules and the compulsory wearing of masks in class. On March 8, secondary pupils are also to return to alternating in-person and remote teaching.

State Premier Michael Kretschmer (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) left no doubt that this was a deliberate human experiment designed to assess more precisely the influence of schools and day-care centres on the level of contagion in the general population. In

an interview with the tabloid, *Bild am Sonntag*, he described the “opening of day-care centres and primary schools” as an important “experiment” whose “effects” would be “seen at the beginning of March.”

Kretschmer is thus following the advice of the Bonn virologist Hendrik Streeck, who in recent weeks and months had repeatedly called in the press and on talk shows for a policy of “trying things out.” Claiming, “we know nothing about the incidence of infections in schools,” Streeck had suggested on the *Sandra Maischberger* show at the end of January, “opening schools in one place and not in another.” This was “not an experiment on humans,” the virologist had hastily claimed at the time.

However, the fact that this is exactly what is happening is openly acknowledged in the bourgeois press. For example, a commentary in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*—which welcomes the school openings—refers to Kretschmer’s plans as a “gamble” for which there were “of course reasons” and noted, “Other federal states have already announced that they also want to dare to undertake the experiment.”

Thuringia, which is governed by the Left Party, plans to return to regular operation in primary schools and day-care centres as of Monday. The “incidence threshold” to be reached is set at 100 cases per 100,000 inhabitants per week, which is so high that from March 1 onwards, in-person classes will presumably also apply to all other grades in most districts. Up to grade seven, masks are not compulsory in class.

A *Tagesschau* report makes it clear that the coming Monday marks the beginning of the comprehensive opening of schools and day-care centres in the vast majority of the federal states:

· **North Rhine-Westphalia, Baden-Württemberg and Saarland**, for example, intend alternating in-person and remote lessons for primary school children from Monday. For day-care centres, “regular operation under pandemic conditions” applies, i.e., unprotected contact between children and educators.

· **Brandenburg** is also switching to alternating teaching at primary schools; day-care centres have already been open for weeks. **Berlin** is also maintaining “emergency care” for primary school children of “key worker” parents and is increasing day-care capacity to 60 percent. Alternate teaching for final-year classes is “possible by arrangement.”

· **Bavaria** is introducing alternating teaching for primary school

classes in districts and cities with an incidence below 100. Also, there is “restricted” regular operation at day-care centres and face-to-face teaching for the final years of grammar schools, vocational, secondary modern and middle schools.

· In **Hesse**, there is alternating teaching for classes one to six and the final years, as well as “restricted regular operation for nurseries.” **Rhineland-Palatinate** is providing alternating teaching for grades one to four and “regular operation under pandemic conditions” in nurseries and child-care centres.

· In **Schleswig-Holstein**, day-care centres and grades one to four are to return to general attendance mode from Monday without dividing up classes or groups. Classes five to 13 will potentially follow on March 7. In **Mecklenburg-Pomerania**, analogous regulations will apply from Wednesday.

· In **Saxony-Anhalt**, there is currently “emergency care” for years one to six and in-person attendance for the final years. As soon as the incidence value drops to 50, regular classes are to be held again “at all schools in the respective district” from March 1.

· **Bremen** and **Hamburg** start relaxations on March 1, although the incidence figures for both city-states are well above the national average. Bremen envisages a return to “attendance at full class size” for primary schools. As in other federal states, an “emergency care provision” is currently in place that deprives working parents of the legal basis to demand leave of absence from their employers.

· In **Lower Saxony**, primary school pupils and special needs pupils with a focus on mental development have already been in alternating classes since January, and this is now to apply to final-year classes as well. A general “return to face-to-face teaching” is targeted for the beginning of March, as well as for day-care centres. Meanwhile, Volkswagen—the largest employer in the state—is planning to set up its own vaccination centres, as it expects to become “part of the German vaccination strategy,” according to a spokesperson. With a vaccination rate of 2.8 percent, the state ranks last in nationwide comparison.

While several federal states boast of offering pupils and school staff one to two free tests per week, teachers report on social media that the testing stations are often out of reach or overloaded. A recent study by the Technical University of Berlin, comparing different indoor situations, has again proven that full classrooms without the mandatory wearing of masks—as well as open-plan offices—are by far the riskiest environments.

Although teachers, educators and their families are therefore directly exposed to an incalculable risk, the chairman of the Standing Vaccination Commission, Thomas Mertens, stated on Tuesday that there was “no need to give teachers priority now in deviation from the [previous] recommendation.” So far, teachers and educators have a lower priority than emergency police officers and law enforcement officers when it comes to being vaccinated.

In their murderous drive to open up day-care centres and primary schools, government leaders rely—as they did at the beginning of the pandemic—on pseudo-scientific studies and a phalanx of academic propagandists of so-called herd immunity. Under the name “Coronavirus Strategy Working Group,” a right-wing network has come out in the open in recent days, demanding that the population “live with the virus” and explicitly calling for the

“opening of day-care centres and primary schools.”

The “working group” is supported by Streeck and consists of eight professors—among them the epidemiologist Klaus Stöhr, the head of the Frankfurt health authority René Gottschalk, Jonas Schmidt-Chanasit from the Bernhard Nocht Institute for Tropical Medicine and Gerd Antes, a founding member of the “Evidence-Based Medicine Network.” They have been known for months as vehement advocates of a herd immunity policy.

In their current position paper, the group is demanding the government draw up detailed “pandemic plans” to be able to determine a politically “targeted pandemic level” depending on the “occupancy of intensive care units.” To this end, a flexible “target corridor” of infected persons and COVID-19 deaths had to be envisaged “that would bring Germany to the end of the pandemic without constant new discussions of principles.”

Like leading government politicians and business associations, these professors claim that “the collateral damage caused by the closure of day-care centres and schools” has been “given too little consideration” in the past. With audacity and ignorance otherwise only known from coronavirus deniers and the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), the authors go on to declare that the “effectiveness of day-care and school closures in reducing ... deaths in the risk groups of the elderly and those in need of care ... is not provable in the literature” and thus represents a “restriction of the fundamental rights of children and young people” that is “imposed on them in an extraneous manner.”

The “proportional increase of the B.1.1.7 variant or other variants” is, at the same time, “no reason to change the SARS-CoV-2 control strategy. ...” There is also “no evidence” for the necessity of additional “protection concepts for schools and kindergartens.” Instead, the British studies on the infection rate of B.1.1.7 “urgently” need to be subjected to “verification in Germany.” This can “only be done in countries with low levels of the variant. *Study protocols and locations must be prepared for this* (emphasis added).”

The consequences of such a herd immunity policy—combined with only partial immunisation—are openly stated by the paper: “With increasing immunity in the population, the probability of the emergence of [variants created under high pressure of selection] increases. This can be expected soon in countries with declining population susceptibility.”



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