Doctors in Germany warn of imminent overloading of hospitals

Markus Salzmann
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Given the dramatic increase in the number of coronavirus infections in Germany, medical experts are calling for an immediate halt to the policy of opening up the economy and the imposition of effective measures to contain the pandemic. Otherwise, they say, there is a risk of an exponential increase in the number of cases and an overload of intensive care units within a very short time.

The president of the German Society for Internal Intensive Care and Emergency Medicine (DGIIN), Christian Karagiannidis, is demanding a hard lockdown and an immediate stop to all planned steps to further reopen businesses and education institutions.

"The decisions for model projects after Easter are completely inappropriate and must be immediately withdrawn by the federal and state governments," the physician told the *Rheinische Post*. Karagiannidis, who is also the scientific director of the DIVI (Interdisciplinary Association for Intensive Care and Emergency Medicine), is demanding "a mixture of a hard lockdown, many vaccinations and tests." This was the only way to "prevent intensive care units being overrun."

Referring to the doctors and nurses who have been fighting for patients' lives under extreme conditions every day for over a year, Karagiannidis appealed to the government and political parties: "I ask politicians not to abandon hospital staff." Containment measures would have to apply nationwide, he said. Germany is "only at the beginning of a massive increase in intensive care patients."

Numerous other medical professionals and scientists are also warning of the effects of the unscrupulous reopening policy. DIVI President Gernot Marx stated, "We are now beginning the third wave in intensive care units and at a very high level. We had already warned about this at the end of February, and this is causing us great concern."

With incidence levels of around 200 per 100,000, emergency medicine specialists have predicted around 5,000 COVID-19 patients in ICUs by early May. According to DIVI, as of Saturday there were 3,334 COVID-19 patients in intensive care, the highest number since the peak of the first wave last year. "We expect a rapid increase in patients over the next few weeks, as the wave of intensive care patients always follows the wave of infection by two to three weeks," Marx said.

"We are facing tough weeks ahead," the head of the Robert Koch Institute (RKI), Lothar Wieler, warned. There were "clear signals" that the third coronavirus wave "can be even worse than the first two waves." We must be prepared for the number of those infected to rise sharply, for hospitals to be overloaded and for "many people to die." Scientists agree on this. Previously, renowned virologists such as Melanie Brinkmann and Christian Drosten had also warned against further relaxations and the associated increase in the number of infections.

On Saturday morning, the RKI reported a seven-day incidence of 124.9, the highest value since mid-January. The day before, the RKI had reported an incidence of 119.1, compared to 76.1 a fortnight ago. If no drastic measures are taken, doctors expect daily infection figures of 50,000 and higher. There are already districts in Thuringia with an incidence rate of over 500, where the national average is 218.

According to the RKI, the opening of schools and day-care centres, which was pursued by the state governments of all colours, is now having a dramatic effect. In its current situation report from Thursday, the RKI assumes that the seven-day incidence among children up to 14 years of age has more than doubled nationwide in the past four weeks. In Berlin alone, where the Social Democratic Party-Left Party-Green Party Senate (state executive) has been particularly aggressive in reopening schools and day-care centres, 176 day-care centres are currently reporting coronavirus cases.

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The B.1.1.7 variant, which now accounts for the majority of infections in Germany, "is undoubtedly more infectious and does not leave children out," notes Burkhard Rodeck, Secretary-General of the German Society for Paediatrics and Adolescent Medicine. In schools and day-care centres, children and adolescents become infected with the highly contagious viral mutation and infect parents and grandparents in the family environment, with fatal consequences. In the meantime, severe illness because of COVID-19 no longer occurs almost exclusively in the elderly and those with previous illnesses, but frequently in younger and healthy people.

A high number of infections with the new variants increases both the risk of resistance to existing vaccines and renewed infection. SPD health politician Karl Lauterbach recently warned that, according to a Harvard University study, there are signs vaccine resistance is developing due to South African and Brazilian variants.

In the neighbouring country of the Czech Republic, where more than 10 percent of the population has already been infected and more than 25,000 people have died, the number of reinfections has risen massively. By the end of February, 1,400 cases were reported in which a person became infected again after having overcome an earlier infection. A month before, only 158 such cases were known. In Brazil, too, researchers put down the enormous infection figures partly because of reinfections with the P.1 variant.

Despite this dramatic development and the urgent warnings of scientists and medical experts, the ruling class is determined to continue its murderous policy placing profits before human lives.

The decision of German Chancellor Angela Merkel (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) on Wednesday to overturn the so-called "Easter Shutdown" just one day after it was announced makes this abundantly clear. At the same time, representatives of the federal and state governments have agreed to rigorously push ahead with reopenings under the guise of "model projects."

In Saarland, for example, there are to be wide-ranging openings throughout the state after Easter without a time limit. From April 6 onwards, restrictions in restaurants as well as in sports and culture will be relaxed or lifted. Visits to theatres, cinemas, concerts and gyms will be possible again with a negative coronavirus test. Further reopenings are to take place two weeks later.

State Premier Tobias Hans (CDU) explained the decision to *Bild*: "One year after the coronavirus pandemic, we must now think of more than just closing and restricting." Comments that the "emergency brake" would be pulled if the number of cases increased are nothing but hot air. So far, in all federal states, previously made decisions when to apply the "emergency brake," such as an incidence rate of 100, have been thrown overboard with absurd justifications as soon as they were reached.

In Bavaria, state Premier Markus Söder (Christian Social Union, CSU) has announced that eight model regions will be opened.

In Thuringia, the government of state Premier Bodo Ramelow (Left Party) calls its criminal game with people's health and lives a "small spring opening." To this end, contact restrictions are to be massively relaxed at Easter in the federal state that currently has the largest coronavirus hotspots. State Health Minister Heike Werner (Left Party) justified this by saying that Easter was one of the most important festivals. From April 10, zoos and botanical gardens are to be reopened, and two days later the retail trade as well.

At the same time, there is no effort to vaccinate the population in sufficient numbers. Months after the vaccine was approved and delivered, only 4.5 percent of the population in Germany has been fully vaccinated. While billions were pumped into businesses immediately after the outbreak of the pandemic as part of the coronavirus emergency packages, hardly anything was done to build up the necessary production capacities and enable health care facilities to cope with the pandemic. Even now, according to data from the RKI and the federal and state health ministries, 33 percent of existing vaccination resources are not being used.

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