

# German government introduces new Infection Protection Act, continuing its herd immunity policy

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On Tuesday, Germany's federal cabinet agreed on a new Infection Protection Act. The legislation, which is intended to give the government more powers in the coronavirus pandemic, is described by politicians and the media as an "emergency brake" against the third wave of the pandemic. The fight against the pandemic must become "more stringent and consistent," explained Chancellor Angela Merkel (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) in a press statement. "The previous federal-state consultations are no longer sufficient for this."

The new law does not mean a departure from the murderous profits-before-lives policy that has already led to almost 80,000 deaths in Germany alone. What is being centralised is not a consistent lockdown policy but allowing the virus to run through the population. While the number of COVID-19 patients in intensive care is rising exponentially and threatens to exceed 6,000 this month, the main drivers of the pandemic—businesses, schools and day-care centres—are to remain open to ensure the flow of profits.

The draft law, which is to be passed "in an emergency procedure" this week if possible, does not mention businesses at all and even if the infection continues to escalate provides for comprehensive "emergency care" to continue the operation of day-care centres. Attendance at schools, however, is to be stopped only if the weekly incidence level exceeds 200 new infections per 100,000 inhabitants for three consecutive days. The previous limit of 100, which was largely ignored by the state governments and has now been reached across the board, is thus being doubled without further ado.

The exponential spread of the virus among children,

which, due to the often-asymptomatic course of the disease, goes predominantly undetected and for the most part is not recorded by the health authorities, will thus continue to worsen. Although the average age of coronavirus patients in intensive care is continuously decreasing, one in two patients still requires a respirator. The number of deaths has also been rising for the past week and was over 342 on Tuesday. On Wednesday, more than 21,000 new infections were reported by the Robert Koch Institute (RKI).

The decision to double the incidence limit for schools is justified by asking students to take a coronavirus rapid test twice a week. The central role in developing this calculus was played by Social Democratic Party (SPD) health politician Karl Lauterbach, who tweeted on Friday that schools could "stay open up to an incidence rate of 200" if "you test twice a week to do so."

Teachers and parents stress that testing in its current form serves as an "alibi for reopening" schools. In the completely unsafe conditions at the schools themselves, this new policy will create high-risk situations. Moreover, model calculations by researchers at the Berlin Technical University have shown that the weekly incidence rate in May would still rise to 1,200 even if all schools and day-care centres conducted three tests a week under textbook conditions. Such a scenario would mean tens of thousands of deaths per week.

Even in the event of a possible end to face-to-face teaching, the draft law holds out "exceptions" for "graduating classes" as well as the possibility of so-called "emergency care" in schools, so that parents can continue to work, and exams can be carried out. To this end, companies are to be "obliged to offer tests"

through an amendment to the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations, which, however, will not come into force for at least a week and does not require any proof of the results to be provided.

Meanwhile, the increase in the number of days a parent can take off when a child is ill from the current 20 to 30 days, being passed at the same time as the law, shines a spotlight on the fact that parents are still being forced to use up their personal sick and holiday days for quarantine orders and COVID-19 illnesses—even if they have been proven to have contracted the disease at work. The cabinet decision states that the children's sick days are to be used by parents "to care for children even when schools and day-care centres are closed"—while foregoing 30 percent of their gross wages.

In addition to accelerating the infection among children and intensifying the exploitation of parents, the new Infection Protection Act also provides for further private contact restrictions and curfews in districts that have a weekly incidence level above 100 for three consecutive days. According to the draft law, in this case, "staying outside a dwelling is prohibited" between 9 p.m. and 5 a.m.—a formulation that is likely to expose homeless people in particular to police harassment.

While general curfews can be part of a rational health plan, depending on the pandemic situation, the government's measure, in its current form, serves to distract from its criminal inactivity, increase the police presence after hours and to enflame right-wing extremists who completely oppose any fight against the pandemic. At the same time, the regulation could have a counterproductive effect, especially in the case of working class housing estates, multi-family apartment buildings, and student and refugee hostels. All these environments have repeatedly proved to be hotspots for so-called superspreading events during the pandemic.

This fact was explicitly acknowledged by leading scientists last Sunday. An open letter to the German government written by the Society for Aerosol Research (GAeF) urgently warns that coronavirus transmission is "extremely rare outdoors," and it is rather "INSIDE the danger lurks." Due to the "measures taken by politicians to combat the pandemic," including "the curfews currently under discussion...many citizens... have misconceptions about

the potential for infection associated with the virus" they write.

The new Infection Protection Act follows almost eight weeks of criminal inaction by the government, which had taken on increasingly aggressive features in recent weeks. While the number of COVID-19 patients admitted to intensive care units began to rise exponentially from the beginning of March, the federal and state governments refused to implement the necessary lockdown, flatly ignored the cries for help from senior intensive care doctors and the protests of leading virologists, and instead systematically opened up schools and retail outlets.

On March 24, Chancellor Angela Merkel personally removed the so-called "Easter Truce," which had only been agreed the day before by the meeting of federal-state politicians. She asked business leaders and trade associations for "forgiveness" and then disappeared almost completely from the political scene for a fortnight. Recently, the summit meeting of state premiers scheduled for Monday was also cancelled just a few days earlier.

In the meantime, the intensive care doctors association DIVI warns that the number of coronavirus intensive care patients threatens to rise to 7,000 before the end of April if developments remain unchanged. This figure is 23 percent higher than the previous peak at the beginning of the year, when intensive care units were on the verge of nationwide collapse, with 5,700 patients and more than 1,000 COVID-19 deaths on many days. "Dear decision-makers, how high are the numbers supposed to go before you want to react?" tweeted the scientific director of the DIVI intensive care register, Christian Karagiannidis, last Wednesday.

In view of the impending overwhelming of hospitals, Lothar Wieler, President of the RKI, called on the media and politicians on Friday, "not to talk or discuss stupidly," but to act immediately. Without a massive reduction in mobility, "many people will lose their lives," he noted. "Every day we act later, we lose people."



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