

Reopening of German economy provokes deadly fourth wave of pandemic

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The daily number of coronavirus infections is rising rapidly in Germany. On Friday, the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) reported 3,142 new infections in one day, about 1,500 more than a week earlier. Even over the weekend, when there are usually far fewer reports, there were more than 2,000 new infections each day, about 500 more than in the previous week, according to the RKI.

The seven-day incidence rate has more than tripled in the last three weeks—from 4.9 on 6 July to 17.5 on 1 August. The 7-day mean has risen from 579 to over 3,000 in the same period.

Daily deaths and hospital admissions are also on the rise. The RKI reported 30 deaths on Friday and 21 on Saturday. According to Johns Hopkins University data, the seven-day mean for deaths was 34 on July 30, having doubled in the previous ten days. The seven-day hospitalisation rate—that is, how many Covid 19 hospitalisations there are per 100,000 residents in a week—rose to 0.41, up from 0.29 in mid-July.

The rapid development of the pandemic is exacerbated by the spread of the highly contagious delta variant. According to the RKI, it is now responsible for 91 percent of cases in Germany.

As a result of the ruthless policies of the federal and state governments in reopening the economy, it will only be a matter of a few weeks before the daily infection figures reach new records. In the UK, Spain and France, tens of thousands are already infected with the virus every day. On Friday, 29,622 new infections were reported in the UK, 24,753 in Spain and 24,309 in France. There was a seven-day incidence rate of 299.9 in the UK, 367.4 in Spain and 217.3 in France.

Earlier this week, Chancellery chief Helge Braun (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) even warned of 100,000 new daily infections in Germany in September. Incidence rates of over 800 are “unfortunately not unrealistic”, he told *Bild am Sonntag*. Currently, there is “an increase in numbers of 60 percent per week. If the delta variant spreads at this rate and we didn’t counter it with an enormously high vaccination rate or a behaviour change, we

would have an incidence rate of 850 in just nine weeks. That would correspond to 100,000 new infections every day!”

Such rates of infection would signify the complete overloading of the health system and another wave of mass deaths. In a model at the beginning of July, the RKI calculated how intensive care utilization could develop in autumn and winter. According to this model, intensive care units would already be heavily utilised, with 6,000 COVID-19 patients at an incidence rate of 400.

Already in previous pandemic waves the health system was overstretched and tens of thousands of people died of the virus in Germany alone. Speaking to broadcaster ZDF, former President of the German Interdisciplinary Association for Intensive and Emergency Medicine (DIVI) Uwe Janssens warned against a repeat of this scenario. “We saw last year what the consequences are if you wait too long and do nothing. This seems to be repeating itself.”

The assessments of serious virologists and the dramatic development of infection rates in Europe and internationally refute the lies of politicians and the media that the danger from the virus has been averted.

An internal RKI paper leaked to the press last week clearly states: “The more cases occur, the more cases of the severe progression of the illness (hospitalisations/ICU) and deaths are registered—with some delay—the higher the burden on the health system. If the incidence rate is very high, the number of these adverse effects also increases, as does the number of severe cases requiring hospital or ICU treatment.”

The paper also notes that “more than 40 million people in our population [...] currently do NOT have full vaccination protection,” warning that “high vaccination rates alone are not sufficient to keep the fourth wave flat.” Therefore, “additional basic protection measures are necessary” to “lower the fourth wave.”

Despite warnings from its own biomedical lead research body, the federal and state governments are sticking to their aggressive reopening policies, ruling out necessary lockdown measures.

“As long as our vaccines against the delta variant work so

well, a classic lockdown is no longer necessary,” Braun claimed. Earlier, Economics Minister Peter Altmeier had told *Bild am Sonntag*: “We must and will prevent a new lockdown.”

This is the position of all the capitalist parties who, throughout the pandemic, have put the profits of big business and the interests of German imperialism above the lives of the population. In essence, they follow the line of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), which has long called for the lifting of all coronavirus protection measures and a return to “normality.”

At state level, the Left Party and the Greens are now aggressively pushing for the opening of schools. On 6 August, Berlin, which is governed by a coalition of the Social Democrats, Left Party and Green Party, will become the third federal state, after Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Hamburg, to return to full in-person teaching after the summer holidays. All other federal states are then to follow by the beginning of September, including Thuringia, led by the Left Party, and Green-governed Baden-Württemberg.

The same plans exist for the universities. On Thursday, the Berlin Senate (state executive) announced the resumption of face-to-face teaching in the upcoming 2021-2022 winter semester. “In the winter semester, around 200,000 students are expected again at the state, confessional and private universities in Berlin,” declared a joint statement by the Senate Department for Science and Research and the state conference of rectors and presidents of Berlin’s universities.

The return to schools and universities, which the trade unions also support, will massively accelerate the spread of the virus throughout the population. The health and lives of the approximately 14 million pupils and students in Germany are also at stake. The vast majority of young people are unprotected. Only just under 40 percent of all 18-59-year-olds in Germany are fully vaccinated. Among those under 18, the vaccination rate is as low as 1.5 percent.

Current experience leaves no doubt that Covid-19 is also a deadly threat to young people.

The situation in Indonesia is particularly dramatic. According to the Indonesian Society of Paediatrics, there are currently more than 360,000 confirmed cases in children, which corresponds to one in eight infections. In recent weeks, over 700 children have died from COVID-19, including over 150 in the week of 12 July alone. What is particularly shocking is that half of them were less than five years old.

In Brazil, COVID-19 is the leading cause of death among children aged 10 to 19. In the first half of 2021 alone, at least 1,581 young people died from the virus.

And even in developed countries, where the delta variant is spreading rapidly, the number of hospitalisations and deaths among children is rising. In the UK, more than 40 children are now hospitalised with COVID-19 every day. And the number of infected children and adolescents is also increasing in Germany. According to the RKI’s weekly report, there is currently “an increase in incidence rates especially in the age groups 10-34 years.”

The mass death and suffering, previously known only in times of war, must be stopped. More than 91,600 people have already died from Covid-19 in Germany alone. Across Europe, there have been over 1.1 million coronavirus deaths, and worldwide, more than 4.2 million have officially succumbed to the virus. Recent studies suggest that the actual death toll is much higher.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the *Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei* (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) have stressed from the beginning that the fight against the pandemic is not just a medical question. It requires the independent mobilisation of the working class based on a socialist programme. To contain the virus and save lives, workers and youth must build independent rank-and-file committees for safer workplaces and education. These must take the fight against the virus into their own hands and organise strikes and protests to enforce all scientifically necessary measures.

In its election manifesto, the SGP writes:

The fight to contain the pandemic is developing into a class struggle, which is showing ever more clearly that the two major classes in society, the capitalist class and the working class, have irreconcilable interests. The official pandemic policy puts profits before human lives. We demand:

The immediate shutdown of all nonessential businesses until the pandemic is under control! Full payments of wages for all workers affected as well as real assistance for the self-employed and comprehensive support for poor households! A globally coordinated vaccine campaign instead of vaccine nationalism and profiteering!

The development of a killer fourth wave of the pandemic underlines the importance of the SGP’s campaign and the urgency of this programme.



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