

German federal and state governments escalate policy of mass infection by reopening schools and dismantling public health measures

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The threat of a renewed wave of mass death in Germany will increase over the coming weeks as millions of students return to school after the summer holidays. On Friday morning, the Robert Koch Institute (RKI), Germany's federal agency for infectious diseases, reported 5,578 cases in the previous 24 hours, a 14-fold increase compared to the number of cases recorded in early July. As of Sunday, the national incidence rate, which is the number of those infected with the virus per 100,000 inhabitants within a seven-day period, was 35.

Helge Braun, the minister of the chancellor's office, recently stated that 100,000 cases per day was "not unrealistic."

The number of COVID-19 patients in hospital is also rising once again, said Gernot Marx, president of the association of intensive care medics, DIVI. Over the preceding seven days, 99 people fell victim to the pandemic in Germany alone.

COVID-19 is spreading most dramatically among young adults and children. According to the RKI, the 15- to 24-year-old age group had the highest incidence rate over the past week, with 60 infections per 100,000 inhabitants. The rise in infections among children, who remain largely unvaccinated, was also explosive.

Under these conditions, the decisions taken last Tuesday by Germany's federal and state governments amount to a political crime. While the highly infectious Delta variant spreads in factories, offices and, with the end of the summer holidays, schools, the remaining public health measures are being systematically dismantled. The public and private network of rapid testing and vaccination sites is being largely liquidated and future lockdowns ruled out at any price.

The text of the final agreement allows large events and football matches with up to 25,000 attendees, while no quarantine will be required for people who are vaccinated or who have recovered from an infection when they return from a high-risk area. Under the slogan "tested, vaccinated, recovered" (3G), the focus will shift away from the incidence rate as a key indicator of the spread of the virus, while recreational and indoor activities will be permitted in principle for people who have had a recent test, have been vaccinated, or have recovered from COVID-19.

The 3G rule, which is itself totally inadequate to guard against infections, can be suspended by the states as they see fit, so long as "the state's pandemic indicator system shows a low infection rate," and an increase in infections "through the suspension of the rule (is)

not to be expected."

Instead of the incidence rate, the focus will shift to the rate of hospital bed occupancies, a demand that has long been raised by far-right advocates of mass infection.

As of October 11, rapid tests will be offered to most members of the public only if they pay out of their own pocket, irrespective of their vaccination status. Anyone who wishes to get tested for the coronavirus after that date, for example in order to decrease the risk of a meeting with relatives, will have to pay between €18 and €40 for a rapid test, or, depending on the provider, over €130 for a PCR test.

As demand increases due to rising incidence rates, test prices could multiply. According to NDR, due to "market economy considerations" there is simply "no upper cost limit" for private tests.

The government's claim that this is aimed at combating a supposed widespread unwillingness to get vaccinated among the unvaccinated population is a lie on many counts. In reality, workers, as has been the case throughout the pandemic, are being asked to choose between their health and their income.

First, a representative survey based on public broadcaster ARD's Deutschlandtrend shows that 83 percent of the population either want to get vaccinated or have already been vaccinated. This is 20 percentage points higher than the current vaccination rate. The 83 percent figure, which has risen by 8 percent since May, suggests that at least one in five people who want to get vaccinated has yet to be able to do so.

Second, alongside the closure of test sites, which were no longer turning a profit due to relatively low incidence rates and high vaccination rates, vaccination centers are also being shut down. This is taking place even as experts warn that the spread of the Delta variant could require another "refresher" dose of the vaccine.

Even prior to the expiration of federal funding for vaccine centers on September 30, centers in eight states are already being dismantled. This applies to the main vaccination center in Hamburg, all centers in Hesse (28) and Baden-Württemberg (8), four centers in Berlin, two in Bavaria, and three out of four centers in Thuringia.

Third, it has long been proven that the Delta variant can strike the fully vaccinated, and that they can suffer extensive long-term complications, acute illness and even death. This was recently confirmed in a study by the Israeli Samson Assuta Ashdod University hospital, and by the rise in hospitalizations in Britain. The number of

daily admissions to hospital doubled from 390 to 800 in a matter of two weeks, due to the Johnson government's brutal reopening policy.

In the United States, physicians across the country have reported that children's hospitals are totally overwhelmed, which is a product of the Biden administration's back-to-school policy. On Saturday, August 7 alone, 259 children were admitted to hospitals across the country, which took the total number of children hospitalized at the time to 1,450.

The German government is heading towards the same scenario. While the federal and state governments are determined to abolish the network of test sites and vaccination centers, millions of unvaccinated students will be sent back to in-person classes in schools where they will be exposed to infection by the Delta variant, virtually without protection.

The ruling elite knows full well that it is putting the lives of children and their relatives at risk. Its representatives are not only familiar with publicly accessible international studies, but have also recently commissioned investigations into the spread of the virus in schools, the results of which are being kept under lock and key by the Conference of Education Ministers (KMK).

In addition, there are the effects of Long COVID, which have yet to be fully researched, and potential delayed symptoms following a COVID-19 infection. A recent nationwide study carried out by the AOK health insurance provider found that one in four of those hospitalized with COVID-19 had to be treated in hospital again at a later date. Thirty-six percent of the cases related to breathing difficulties, while 29 percent concerned neurological disruption.

An interactive graphic from the Berliner Morgenpost, which shows the course of incidence rates in age groups and each state, reveals that the seven-day incidence rate in the 5- to 14-year old age group was constantly the highest from April 20, the peak of the third wave, until the beginning of the summer holidays. International studies have repeatedly proven that if the virus spreads widely among children, it rapidly shifts to other age groups through infections in households.

Despite this, schools in every state will return to full in-person learning with no cohorts for students. The chief aim is to ensure that the labor power of parents is freed up in order to secure the profit interests of German big business.

Brandenburg Education Minister Britta Ernst (Social Democrats), who is also president of the KMK and the wife of the federal finance minister, demanded as early as June that all schools be opened after the summer holidays, irrespective of the vaccination status of students and their relatives. With the KMK decision on August 6, all 16 states adopted this demand.

In the struggle to safeguard those who depend on them most for protection, teachers and parents confront a united front of politicians, business associations and trade unions.

In the states in northern Germany, where schools already opened in early August, the incidence rate among the 5- to 14-year-old age group is already 39 per 100,000 inhabitants (Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania), 148 (Schleswig-Holstein) and 211 (Hamburg). In Schleswig-Holstein's state capital, Kiel, the incidence rate among the 5- to 14-year olds is a staggering 391 per 100,000 inhabitants. According to the RKI, 60 children in the city from this age group have been infected over the past week. In Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, the requirement to wear a mask in school will be lifted today, despite an increasing incidence rate.

As of today, the seven-day incidence rate will no longer play a role in the coronavirus policies of the state of Baden-Württemberg. The

Green-led government's pandemic indicator system will only call for public health measures when hospitals start to fill up. Education Minister Theresa Schopper (Greens) plans to eliminate the requirement for students to be divided up into cohorts when schools return on September 13, even though air filters are lacking in most schools. This will be followed two weeks later by the abandonment of rapid testing and mask wearing.

In June, Schopper told the pro-business newspaper *Die Welt*, "We shouldn't kid ourselves, Delta will spread throughout the schools." To survive the threatened sickness, children and young people merely need "a pack of tissues," according to the minister. In this way, Schopper is intensifying the policy of mass death for which her predecessor, Susanne Eisenmann (Christian Democrats), was punished in last March's state election.

The Greens' policy of mass infection is outdone only by the Left Party. In Thuringia, a coronavirus ordinance has been in force since July 1 that includes no future generalised prohibitions or closures. Contact restrictions and the requirement for students to get tested have been totally abandoned. By the end of the month, large events with up to 500 people indoors and 1,000 people outdoors will be permitted, with the approval of the Left Party-controlled Health Ministry.

For the start of the school year on September 6, Left Party Education Minister Helmut Holter plans to abolish the mask mandate in schools and prohibit testing. The Thuringia state government, whose leader Bodo Ramelow could not take part in the meeting between federal and state government representatives because he was on holiday in the Tyrol Alps, demanded the inclusion in the final agreement of the statement, "The delivery of lessons in-person and the maintenance of open schools has top priority."

This is also the demand of the Education and Science trade union (GEW), whose new leader, Maike Finner, told *Der Spiegel* in June that it is "inconceivable" to close schools for a long period of time once again.

Although she was "quite sure" that not all children and young people, and their parents, will be vaccinated by the beginning of the school year, the goal must be "routine operation in the coming winter." Finner, who is following in the footsteps of the long-term GEW president Marlis Tepe, played a key role as head of the GEW in North Rhine-Westphalia in imposing the policies of austerity and mass infection pursued by the state government led by Armin Laschet and his hated education minister, Yvonne Gebauer (Free Democrats), against the resistance of parents and teachers.

Behind the refusal of all parties to protect the health and lives of children are the interests of German imperialism, which will not tolerate any intervention into its accumulation of profit. On the eve of the summit between the federal and state governments, the Institute of German Business, a pseudo-scientific think tank aligned with the employers' associations, warned that even a limited lockdown would cost German capitalists tens of billions of euros.



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