COVID-19 infections rising as children return to school in Germany

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A fresh wave of infections and hospitalisations of children and adolescents is looming in Germany following the start of in-person classes at schools. Forty percent of the German population has not yet been fully vaccinated, and the trend in infection figures is soaring once again.

The seven-day average of infections has doubled in the last ten days alone. According to the Robert Koch Institute (RKI), this increase is taking place “much earlier and faster than last year, when comparable incidence rates were first reached in October.” The institute reported last Wednesday of around 16,700 new infections and a rate of infection indicating exponential growth at 1.19.

The explosion in the incidence of infection is mostly affecting younger age groups. Incidence rates were highest last week among school children (113), followed by the next highest age group of 15- to 34-year-olds (88). While the seven-day incidence is rising rapidly in all age groups, it has almost doubled in one week among the almost completely unvaccinated group of 5- to 14-year-olds.

Despite the triple-digit incidence among children, all state governments are set to move to full face-to-face learning after the summer holidays and systematically reintroduce compulsory attendance—a political crime backed by all of the political parties represented in the German parliament from the Left Party to the conservative Union parties.

Currently, only the city state of Hamburg has felt compelled to temporarily suspend compulsory attendance after the incidence rate among school children rose to 222.

There can be no doubt that the infection of children is deliberately accepted and intended. The situation is particularly acute in Schleswig-Holstein, where the incidence rate among schoolchildren rose to 166 last week and is also driving up infection figures in other age groups.

Dr Anne Marcic, infection control officer at the state health ministry, told Norddeutscher Rundfunk (NDR) that in the state it is “no longer a problem when young children become infected,” rather, it is “their only opportunity to immunise themselves.” Preventing children from becoming infected is an “illusion,” the government adviser said: “They will come into contact with the pathogen.”

The weekly *Die Zeit* noted that “more than nine million children under twelve” who have not been vaccinated are now being deliberately “left to be contaminated by the virus.” Although they had “no choice” and “had to forego children’s birthdays, day-care festivities, many months of attendance classes and organised sports over the past year and a half,” these children are now being put at risk of contracting COVID-19 in the coming months.

The German Health Minister Jens Spahn, Bavaria’s Premier Markus Söder and other government politicians had earlier declared that “everyone who is not vaccinated” would be infected with the coronavirus in winter. These politicians neglected to outline the considerable suffering such infection of children and others means for working families.

In reality, this murderous contagion policy is endangering the lives and health of hundreds of thousands of children and their families. This is shown by figures from the US, where infections are massively increasing after schools reopened. In the third week of August alone, 180,000 children became infected. In the same period, 24 children died of COVID-19. In the total population, the daily number of infections has risen above 170,000. Last Wednesday, almost 1,300 people died as a result of the pandemic.

The deadly dangers of acute coronavirus infection are compounded by the risk of late and long-term symptoms, including multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children

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(MIS-C) and Long Covid. An infection can lead to a loss of up to 7 IQ points, inflicting more cognitive damage than a stroke. A survey from the UK found that 9 to 13 percent of children and young people infected with COVID-19 still had at least one symptom five weeks after infection.

The RKI, which relies on reports from local health authorities, concludes that the number of COVID-19 outbreaks in schools "may have recently begun to show a renewed increase (despite school holidays in most German states)." The original incidence rate benchmark of 35 for alternate education and 50 for remote learning have long been jettisoned by the country's federal and state governments.

The danger in classrooms is further increased because one and a half years after the start of the pandemic, only a small minority of classrooms are equipped with protective measures such as air filters. The government's announced funding programme of 200 million euros amounts to just one-fifth of the minimum sum that experts say would be needed to install air filters in all schools. It corresponds to less than 0.4 percent of the Bundeswehr's (Germany army) annual budget.

Moreover, several federal states have adopted rules to keep schools open as long as possible. Berlin, governed by a coalition of the Social Democratic Party, the Left Party and the Greens, has an incidence rate of nearly 75 and has introduced a three-tier plan, which envisages that attendance will continue to take place for selective grades even in the highest tier, i.e., highest level of infection. Assignment of the three levels is not dependent on incidence values, but rather on the decision of respective authorities.

In the state of North Rhine-Westphalia (current incidence 125.9), face-to-face teaching will take place regardless of incidence levels. In Saxony, primary and special schools are to restrict their operations only at an incidence of 100. Schools in Thuringia are also subject to a tier system for which incidence figures are irrelevant. In the case of an infection at the school, only the infected person and all immediate contacts are to be sent into quarantine, but the school is to remain open.

For all other federal states, there are currently no rules as to when schools are to be closed, putting no limits on possible rates of infection.

In addition to keeping schools open, some federal states are abolishing basic protective measures, such as mandatory masks in class. In Bremen, Hesse, Saarland, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia, masks are currently not compulsory in class. In Lower Saxony, Rhineland-Palatinate and Saxony, the wearing of masks only applies when the incidence exceeds 35, in Bavaria at primary schools when the incidence exceeds 50 and at secondary schools when the incidence exceeds 25. In Berlin, masks are only compulsory for the first four weeks and then depend on incidence levels. In Hamburg, masks need not be worn for sports, music and theatre classes.

In Baden-Württemberg, where the Greens fill the posts of state premier and Minister of Education, the mask requirement is to be lifted two weeks after the start of the school year. The magazine *familie.de* reports that parents in Baden-Württemberg face a fine of up to 1,000 euros if they refuse to send their child to school.

At an online event organised by the *World Socialist Web Site* on 22 August, leading scientists unanimously declared that eradicating the virus was the only justifiable policy in the pandemic. Protective measures such as vaccination, masks and air filters can only succeed in the long run if they are part of a strategy of ending the pandemic by eradicating the virus. Only the Socialist Equality Party (SGP) is fighting for such a strategy in Germany's September 26 federal election, prioritising the health of the world's population above corporate profits.

The German parliament and all of the country's state parliamentary parties are willing to put the lives of millions of children at risk in order to maintain the profits of big business. Instead of eradicating the virus and making real investments in safe education, they are forcing children and their parents to become infected by compulsory attendance. To counter this brutal profit-before-lives programme of the ruling class, students, teachers and parents must build independent action committees to fight for safe education based on an anti-capitalist, socialist perspective.

Register today to build action committees and join the Safe Education Action Committees Network Facebook group!

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