

School mask requirements overturned in last German states despite high infection levels

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Despite rising infection levels, schools are systematically dismantling all protective measures against transmission of the coronavirus. These include social distancing rules, quarantine orders and even testing. Over the last two weeks, a number of state governments took another significant step down the road to mass infection of unvaccinated children with the elimination of mandatory mask-wearing in the classroom. This policy, in the interest of securing the profits of big business, endangers the health and lives of hundreds of thousands of students and teachers.

The states of Bremen, Hesse, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Saxony-Anhalt have already abandoned compulsory mask-wearing for all grades since the start of the school term. It has also been lifted for grades one and two in Lower Saxony and up to grade four in Saxony. In Rhineland-Palatinate and Thuringia, mask requirements are controlled by reference values of a “corona traffic light,” which are set so high that the requirement to wear masks only comes into force when it is already too late.

Other German states have followed suit: Brandenburg lifted obligatory mask-wearing on August 23 at elementary schools; Saarland on October 1 for all classes; in Berlin, grades one to six; and in Bavaria on October 4.

But the remaining states will follow this trend in the coming days and weeks: In Baden-Württemberg, the requirement to wear a mask will be dropped on October 18, in North Rhine-Westphalia on November 2, and in Schleswig-Holstein it will be relaxed in November after the fall vacations. Saxony and Lower Saxony—where the requirement has already been dropped for the lower grades—have already announced that they want to relax it even further.

This policy of mass infection by all federal and state

parliamentary parties deliberately endangers the lives and health of hundreds of thousands of children and young people. Since the end of the summer holidays, a clear increase of case numbers among children and young people is underway. In the 5- to 14-year-old group, the incidence level is currently 178 (per 100,000) and in the 15- to 34-year-old group it is 89. According to the Robert Koch Institute, the number of outbreaks in schools “increased again very significantly from the beginning of August to mid-September 2021.”

The same picture is emerging in the United Kingdom and the United States, where schools have opened fully just as they did after the summer vacation. In the UK, at least one in 20 children has now been infected—an average of one child per classroom.

It is also clear how dangerous the consequences of a coronavirus infection can be, even for children and young people. In the UK, around 40 children are hospitalized every day due to the virus. By July, 25 had already died and since the end of the summer vacations, 10 more have succumbed. In Indonesia, about 100 children are currently dying every week, and in Brazil, 1,518 schoolchildren have already fallen victim to COVID-19 this year. Eleven under-18s have already died in Germany.

The abolition of the requirement to wear masks is part of a worldwide policy of the ruling class to remove any protective measures against the virus. Here in Germany, it is being pushed by all federal and state parliamentary parties. From the Left Party to the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), all have supported the reopening of schools and ensured the lifting of the requirement to wear a mask. In the federal election campaign, all the chancellor candidates spoke out against another lockdown to save lives.

In particular, the nominally “left” parties are pushing

an aggressive reopening policy. Left Party-led Thuringia has had the highest incidence level of any state for almost the entire pandemic. Just a few weeks ago in a tweet, state Premier Bodo Ramelow defended this policy—which has already led to more than 4,400 deaths in Thuringia—as “scientific”— immediately garnering massive opposition.

The removal of all safeguards is a thoroughly anti-scientific policy, designed solely to return to “normality” to keep production running and profits flowing. Scientists, on the other hand, warned against ending the mask requirement. Virologist Melanie Brinkmann, for example, condemned it as “premature,” citing the high number of unvaccinated children.

Eberhard Bodenschatz of the Max Planck Institute explained, “If we now drop the mask requirement after the elimination of mandatory testing in many situations, we will basically be in an undisturbed life as we were before the pandemic ... So why shouldn’t the pandemic come back?”

The trade unions have played a central role in the unsafe reopening of schools and the dismantling of the last protections. Around the world, they have helped support the reopenings and sabotaged any protest against them. On Monday, Education and Science Union (GEW) President Maike Finnen declared, “Schools should stay open.”

Protest is being voiced from many sides against the dangerous measures, which contradict any scientific findings. In Baden-Württemberg, the VBE education association warned against ending the mask requirement too soon. Its chairman, Gerhard Brand, declared, “We shouldn’t rush into anything; the pandemic situation and vaccination rate are unchanged.” In Berlin, almost 2,000 people signed a petition against the end of mandatory mask wearing in schools in a short period of time.

The growing resistance to dangerous policies is taking on more concrete forms outside the major parties and unions. Lisa Diaz, a mother from the United Kingdom, called for a one-day school strike for October 1, which was supported by thousands of parents, workers and young people worldwide, who tweeted their agreement and sent statements of solidarity.

This growing opposition needs to be developed and advanced. The *World Socialist Web Site* calls for

building rank-and-file committees for safe education that network internationally, and are independent of the unions and bourgeois parties. The October 1 strike showed that resistance to the policy of mass infection is an international task that can only be carried out against these parties and unions.

To fight the pandemic, workers and youth need a scientific understanding of the pandemic. The WSWS is hosting an online event with leading scientists on the need to eradicate the virus on October 24. Register for the meeting here and sign up to build a rank-and-file committee today!



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