

Germany's reopening policy leads to surge in COVID-19 infection rates

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Germany's COVID-19 incidence rate, which is the number of people per 100,000 inhabitants infected within seven days, has exploded over recent days. Within a week, it rose from 75 infections per 100,000 inhabitants to 118, an increase of about 50 percent. The number of daily new infections increased to more than 23,000 on Wednesday. The number of cases is significantly higher than at the same time last year.

The number of people infected with COVID-19 requiring intensive care has also been rising steadily since the beginning of October. There are currently 1,622 COVID-19 patients in intensive care. There were 150 new hospitalizations registered for the day on Monday. The incidence rate for hospitalization is 2.77 per 100,000 inhabitants. Around 70 people are succumbing to the virus every day.

The sharpest rise in infections has been recorded in the state of Thuringia, which is governed by a Left Party/Social Democrat/Green coalition. At 224 infections per 100,000 inhabitants, the incidence rate is more than twice the national average—an increase of 85 cases per 100,000 people compared to the previous week. At 7.72 per 100,000 inhabitants, the incidence of hospitalization is also well above the national average.

Like last year, schools and kindergartens in particular are once again central sources of infection. The age group with the highest infection rate is 5- to 14-year-olds, with an incidence rate of 224 per 100,000 people, followed by 15- to 34-year-olds with an incidence of 138. The number of outbreaks in schools increased sharply from early August to early October, directly due to the opening of schools without adequate safety measures.

Over the last four weeks, there were 166 outbreaks in kindergartens and 758 in schools. The figures for the last two weeks are incomplete due to late reporting, meaning the true number of outbreaks is likely even higher. At the end of September, the number of outbreaks in schools reached a new high of 243 per week. An outbreak results in an average of five infections.

Despite this catastrophic situation, all parties in Germany's federal parliament are in favor of further dismantling protective measures. Health Minister Jens Spahn (Christian Democrats, CDU) repeated his call on Sunday to end the "epidemic situation of national importance" when it expires on November 24. This decision will remove the legal basis for most of the protective measures against the spread of COVID-19.

This corresponds to the interests of all parties of the ruling class. The liberal Free Democrats and far-right Alternative for Germany have long been in favor of an end to the remaining public health measures, but the nominally "left" parties are also open supporters of the policy of mass infection.

The Greens are calling for a "transitional arrangement" once the "epidemic situation" comes to an end. Keeping the "epidemic situation" unchanged is the "wrong answer," they claim. SPD parliamentary group leader Rolf Mützenich told the Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland (RND) that the SPD was also not aiming to extend the "epidemic situation." According to Die Welt, the Left Party is also calling for an end to the "epidemic situation."

Leading representatives of the Left Party, such as party founder Oskar Lafontaine, or the former parliamentary group leader Sahra Wagenknecht, are working with right-wing COVID-19 deniers and are calling for an end to all protective measures in the form of a "Freedom Day." The state governments in which the Left Party is involved are already systematically dismantling public health measures.

The unions also support the reopening policy. Maike Finner, chairwoman of the Education and Science Union (GEW), campaigned in comments to the RND to keep schools open in autumn and winter. "If the prevention path is continued consistently, the schools can remain open," she cynically declared. In fact, the GEW supports the current moves to dismantle the last remaining mitigation measures. "We expressly welcome the fact that the masks are falling," said Bernd Schauer, GEW State Director of Schleswig-Holstein, in response to the news that the state would scrap

its mask mandate in school classrooms.

With the dismantling of the last remaining safeguards, the established parties are creating conditions for mass death on a scale that will surpass the tens of thousands of fatalities recorded last winter.

Scientists around the world are warning of the dangerous consequences these policies will have. “The Delta variant is so infectious that the unvaccinated are infected very quickly, and this is especially due to the seasonal effect when everyone goes inside,” warned Christian Karagiannidis, the scientific director of the intensive care register of the German Interdisciplinary Association for Intensive Care and emergency medicine (DIVI), in an interview with Deutschlandfunk.

He dismissed the official propaganda that it is possible to open everything up because of the high vaccination rate, warning that the policy threatened to overwhelm ICUs. “On the one hand, we are seeing a very significant increase for about ten days with considerable growth rates in the incidence rates ... and the incidence rates are still extremely closely linked to admissions to intensive care, and that causes us great concern,” he said.

The situation in hospitals is already worse than at the same time last year. There are currently over 1,500 COVID patients in intensive care, compared to 360 in autumn 2020. The number of free beds was 8,000 last October. Currently, only 2,500 beds are free.

Karagiannidis also denied official claims that COVID-19 was “less severe” for young people. He gave two reasons for this. Firstly, “the severity of the disease is of course extremely high and the burden on the intensive care units due to cases requiring ventilation is enormous.” Secondly, “because the young people survive longer, the occupancy on the wards is kept high for a very long time.”

At the online event “How to end the pandemic,” organised by the WSWs and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, scientists and doctors who have been leading voices for taking measures to eliminate COVID-19 denounced the consequences of the reopening policies pursued by almost every government around the world.

The ruling class decision to “live with the virus” makes the question of a working class strategy to end the pandemic all the more urgent. Since the last WSWS webinar in late August, the number of official deaths has risen by more than half a million to almost 5 million, and the number of infected people has risen by more than 30 million to 244 million. Instead of less dangerous variants—as defenders of a herd immunity or mitigation strategy claim—the virus produces mutations that are increasingly infectious and deadly.

The webinar laid out a clear strategy to eliminate the virus globally. In his introduction to the event, WSWS international editorial board chairman David North summarized the basic elements of a scientifically guide strategy for the worldwide elimination of the virus:

1. The target of Sars-CoV-2—the virus that causes COVID-19—is not individuals, but entire societies. The virus’ mode of transmission is directed toward achieving mass infection. Sars-CoV-2 has evolved biologically to strike billions, and, in so doing, kill millions.

2. Therefore, the only effective strategy is one based on a globally coordinated campaign aimed at the elimination of the virus on every continent, in every region, and in every country. There is no effective national solution to this pandemic. Humanity—people of all races, ethnicities, and nationalities—must confront and overcome this challenge through a vast collective and truly selfless global effort.

3. The policies pursued by virtually all governments since the outbreak of the pandemic must be repudiated. The subordination of that which should be the unquestioned priority of social policy—the protection of human life—to the interests of corporate profit and private wealth accumulation cannot be allowed to continue.

4. The initiative to bring about a decisive turn to a strategy directed toward global elimination must come from a socially conscious movement of millions of people.

5. This global movement must draw upon scientific research. The persecution of scientists—many of whom labor under threats to their livelihoods and even their lives—must be ended. The global elimination of the virus requires the closest working alliance between the working class—the great mass of society—and the scientific community.”



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