

Fourth coronavirus wave leads to massive outbreaks at German schools and universities

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Within a week, the seven-day incidence rate of the coronavirus in Germany has risen by more than 40, to a level of 155 per 100,000. It is almost as high as it was at the peak of the deadly third wave. The increase cuts across all age groups and is significantly higher than at the same time last year.

The number of new infections reported daily in Germany has reached a new high. The Robert Koch Institute (RKI) reported 33,949 new coronavirus infections within one day on Thursday. This is 172 more than on December 18, 2020, the day with the highest number of confirmed infections so far.

Along with this, the number of coronavirus patients in intensive care units is also rising sharply in all age groups. Within the last day, more than 600 infected patients have been hospitalized. The hospitalization incidence is currently 3.29, with 2,058 ill patients in the ICU—an increase of 74 from the previous day.

“We are in a critical situation of the pandemic,” the chief executive of the German Hospital Association, Gerald Gass, told *Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland*. “If this trend continues, we will have 3,000 patients in intensive care units again in just two weeks,” he warned.

As with previous waves, the number of outbreaks is increasing in nursing homes and hospitals. Last week, there were 78 outbreaks in medical facilities (an increase of 23 from the previous week) and 122 outbreaks in nursing homes and homes for the elderly (an increase of 44 from the previous week). In total, there were nearly 2,000 new cases.

It is not uncommon for these outbreaks to be fatal. In a nursing home in Brandenburg last week, the number of residents who died increased to eleven. In a nursing facility in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, an outbreak resulted in 17 deaths.

The latest rise in infections is a direct result of the criminal policy of reopening the economy and dismantling protective measures in all areas. The recklessness of all state governments is particularly evident in schools. Among 5-to-19-year-olds, the seven-day incidence level is now over

180, and among 10-to-14-year-olds, it is even over 330.

In the last four weeks, there have been 190 coronavirus outbreaks at kindergartens and 768 at schools. In both cases, however, the last two weeks cannot yet be conclusively assessed, due to late reports. The number of school outbreaks has been increasing significantly since the beginning of August. These numbers can clearly be attributed to the reopening of schools and the dismantling of protective measures.

Despite this, all state governments are sticking to their unsafe school policies. Since the start of school after the end of the summer vacations, they are trying to outdo each other in who is the fastest to abolish protective measures such as distancing regulations or mandatory mask-wearing. On November 2, the mask-wearing requirement for nearly 2.5 million students was dropped in the most populous state, North Rhine-Westphalia. School administrators were expressly prohibited by the state Education Ministry from opposing these dangerous regulations.

In Schleswig-Holstein and Saxony, too, the mask-wearing requirement is to be lifted again after the autumn vacations—contrary to the wishes of many students. “In the student body, we are largely in agreement: we would rather put on masks in class and be safe from coronavirus than be taught at home,” explained Oliver Sachsze, deputy chairman of the state student council, for example.

Thuringia is particularly clear in its pursuit of deliberate mass infection. Although the incidence level among 15-to-34-year-olds is 273 and among 5-to-14-year-olds 527, the Left Party-led state government is continuing to maintain unsafe classroom teaching. The requirement to wear a mask still does not apply to elementary school students. Testing is back, but untested students are allowed to continue coming to school in separate learning groups.

Infections are also on the rise at universities, which recently began their winter semesters again with in-person classes. In mid-October, the nearly three million students at German universities were sent back under unsafe conditions. Now the first consequences of this policy are beginning to

show.

In Göttingen, the Faculty of Economics had to cancel its orientation weeks due to the increase in coronavirus infections. City spokesman Dominik Kimyon said it was difficult to determine exactly where the infections were coming from.

Seven infections also occurred during the orientation weeks at Leuphana University in Lüneburg, which can be attributed primarily to three study groups. At Leibnitz University in Hannover, there were two confirmed infections related to the orientation period.

At Freie Universität Berlin, the Korea Institute had to switch to online formats again just one week after resuming face-to-face teaching. Infections were also reported at the History and Cultural Studies department, including several cases of vaccine breakthroughs. Previously, the university president's office had stated that it did not expect any serious outbreaks, due to the high vaccination rate.

Resistance is growing to this policy of deliberate infection at universities. At the last meeting of the Humboldt University student parliament (StuPa), the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) campus club introduced a resolution opposing face-to-face teaching and calling for "an immediate return to online teaching." After an amendment, the following text was passed:

The StuPa criticizes the current course of the presidium to hold as many courses as possible in person without creating effective protective measures at the same time. Due to this short-term and chaotic decision, students are being exposed to health hazards and risk groups are being denied participation in courses. Students who have left Berlin due to the pandemic are now also faced with the task of finding an apartment in Berlin from one second to the next.

We call on the university management to oblige lecturers to create real options and to allow students to decide whether they want to participate in the courses in person or digitally. This should not put students who attend digitally at a disadvantage.

Outside of nurseries, schools, and universities, coronavirus outbreaks are occurring in numerous other places where workers must assemble without adequate safety measures. Last week, the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) attributed 643 infections to outbreaks at workplaces, 1,075 at educational institutions and 71 at refugee shelters. But because the origin of the vast majority of infections cannot be identified, the

number of unreported cases is much higher.

The explosion in case numbers and the threat of yet another deadly winter wave underscores the importance of the strategy to eliminate the virus. The international editorial board of the *World Socialist Web Site* said in a statement earlier this week:

Amid the ongoing wave of mass death, governments worldwide are scrapping all remaining measures to slow the spread of COVID-19, with the grotesque mantra that society must "learn to live with the virus." Two parallel processes are unfolding. Countries that had limited mitigation measures in place are now lifting them all, while countries that had more aggressive measures aimed at eliminating the virus are giving in to mounting pressure to let the virus rip through society.

The fight to eliminate and eradicate the virus cannot be left to politicians who are already responsible for at least five million coronavirus deaths. The statement explains:

Fundamentally, the fight to stop the pandemic must be taken into the schools and workplaces of every country through a globally-coordinated campaign uniting masses of workers worldwide. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees was founded for this purpose, and will serve as the central nexus to coordinate the global struggles of the working class to end the pandemic and save millions of lives.

The development of a coordinated network of working class organizations throughout the world must be connected to the building of a socialist political leadership in the working class, the International Committee of the Fourth International, to connect the fight against the pandemic with the fight against exploitation, inequality, war, dictatorship and the capitalist system.



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