

Massive COVID-19 outbreaks in Germany's elderly care homes

Markus Salzmann
8 November 2021

With the rapid rise in COVID-19 infections in Germany, massive outbreaks are being recorded in elderly care homes. Once again, it is the residents, who are often in poor health or have pre-existing conditions, and the nursing staff who are suffering the most due to the criminal pandemic policy of the government.

In the first two waves of the pandemic in the spring and autumn of 2020, the nursing homes, in addition to hospitals, became hotspots for COVID-19 infections. According to the AOK Federal Association, the mortality rate in nursing homes during this period was significantly higher than the average of previous years. As the “Nursing Report 2021” by the AOK Scientific Institute found, 20 percent more deaths occurred in the spring than in previous years. From October to December 2020, mortality even exceeded the level of previous years by an average of 30 percent.

With the prioritized vaccination of older people, the imposition of visiting bans in elderly care homes and other medical facilities, as well as other—albeit inadequate—protective measures such as school closings and the partial shutdown of public life, the situation stabilized somewhat and infections in the facilities declined.

However, the unscrupulous reopening policy of the last few months has now led to an even more disastrous situation. Despite the vaccinations, infections are higher than last year at the same time. A massive increase in the number of deaths is imminent in the coming winter months.

Although representatives of all political parties insisted last year that the massive outbreaks in care facilities should not recur, they are happening again all over Germany. The devastating outbreaks of the past few days and weeks make it clear where the policies of federal and state governments have led.

Four people recently died of a COVID-19 infection in a retirement home in Salzwedel (Saxony-Anhalt). A total of 38 people were infected with coronavirus. The infection was apparently brought into the facility from outside. The incidence rate in the Altmark Salzwedel district is currently over 400 infections per 100,000 inhabitants.

According to District Administrator Michael Ziche (Christian Democrats), the schools were the starting point for the wave of infections. Ziche said the situation was “worrying.” The intensive care units in the regional clinics are fully occupied. Some of the patients have to be treated in Magdeburg.

Sixty-eight residents and 22 employees tested positive in a nursing home in Norderstedt. Eight people, including one contact, died as a result of the infection. The public prosecutor in Kiel has now initiated a post-mortem investigation to check whether there were criminally relevant responsibilities. It is noteworthy that, according to the district, visits are already allowed again in the facility, since it has been declared that no one is infectious anymore.

Thirty-nine residents and 11 employees tested positive in the St. Josef House in the Bavarian capital of Munich. Siegfried Benker, managing director of the municipal agency for elderly care homes, said that infections are part of the “new normal” in nursing homes.

Thirty percent of the employees at the care home are not vaccinated. Only after the massive outbreak were workers ordered to wear FFP-2 (N95) masks again. At the same time, Benker refused to take any other kind of protective measures. “We don’t want to close our homes like last year,” he told the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

In a care facility in Bad Doberan, 17 people have now died after a COVID-19 outbreak in mid-October. Most

of the 83 residents of the care facility had tested positive since the beginning of October. Out of 60 nurses at the facility, 35 also tested positive.

The State Office for Health and Social Affairs in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania revealed in its current report that the number of nursing homes currently affected by coronavirus infections has increased from 10 to 13 within a few days. A total of 161 residents and 72 nurses were infected last Monday.

In a facility in Schorfheide in the Barnim district (Brandenburg), 12 residents died as a result of an infection after 44 residents and 17 employees had previously tested positive. Only half of the employees have a complete vaccination status, according to an announcement from the responsible medical officer. Only since the outbreak began have workers been tested on a daily basis.

The first criminal complaint in connection with the outbreak has now been filed. According to information from the Frankfurt (Oder) public prosecutor's office, a citizen's complaint was filed with the police's internet station alleging attempted bodily harm resulting in death. The public prosecutor's office will now examine the facts, as the RBB reported.

The list goes on and on, including outbreaks from all regions and federal states. The situation in Thuringia is particularly dramatic. According to data from the state administration office, more than one in five of the 339 elderly care homes in the state was affected by COVID-19 outbreaks on Thursday. In Thuringia, the seven-day incidence rate on Friday was 386.9 infections per 100,000 inhabitants, more than twice the national average.

In addition, the state's intensive care beds will soon be fully occupied. According to the DIVI register, only 72 intensive care beds were free on Thursday. Between Monday and Thursday alone, the number of COVID-19 patients in intensive care units rose by 20, an increase of 25 percent within four days. Minister President Bodo Ramelow (Left Party) said on ZDF television, "In the next few days we will reach the situation where we no longer have enough intensive care beds."

What Ramelow neglects to mention is the fact that he and his government are largely responsible for the catastrophic situation. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the Left Party politician has been a proponent of the murderous conception of "herd

immunity." Under his leadership, Thuringia spearheaded the relaxation of public health safeguards, although it was absolutely clear that this would lead to a resurgence in the number of cases with all the consequences that it entails.

The statements by Ramelow's Health Minister Heike Werner (Left Party) should be considered in this context. Werner spoke out on Thursday for an expansion of the test requirement for employees in nursing homes. "Currently only the unvaccinated are tested. I think it will have to be expanded so that the unvaccinated are tested daily and the vaccinated maybe once a week, in order to have at least some kind of screening," said the minister.

This puts her in line with Federal Health Minister Jens Spahn and her colleagues from the other federal states. Spahn also stated that he wanted to campaign for mandatory testing in elderly care and nursing homes and, if necessary, promote enforcement by federal law in parliament.

Apart from the fact that the obligation to test should never have been suspended and is completely insufficient as the sole measure to prevent further cases of infection, it is the height of cynicism when Spahn, Werner and other government representatives, who have been advocating unchecked infection for months, now pretend to be acting for the benefit of patients, residents and employees.

Just a few days ago, Spahn—despite the skyrocketing number of cases—pushed for the end of the official declaration of an "epidemic situation of national scope." The Social Democrats, Greens and Free Democrats, which have a majority in the new federal parliament, have agreed not to extend the "epidemic situation" in November. This will eliminate the legal basis that enables the federal and state governments to enact protective measures such as mask requirements, social distancing regulations and lockdown measures.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact