

Herd immunity policy creates explosion of COVID-19 infections in German nurseries and schools

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Although the number of official COVID-19 deaths in Germany has exceeded 100,000, the infection figures are escalating and a new, dangerous variant (Omicron) of the virus is spreading, all the bourgeois parties refuse to take the necessary protective measures. Significantly, last Thursday in the Bundestag (federal parliament), the “traffic light” coalition members—Social Democrats (SPD), Greens, Liberal Democrats (FDP)—decided to end the designation of an “epidemic emergency” and thus removed the legal basis for comprehensive lockdowns.

Since then, the numbers of those infected have really exploded. By Friday morning, the seven-day incidence rate per 100,000 inhabitants was 438.2, according to the Robert Koch Institute (RKI), with more than 76,000 people confirmed infected with COVID-19 in the last 24 hours alone. With a mortality rate of 0.8 percent, about 610 of these people will succumb to the virus. Already, between 300 and 400 people are dying from coronavirus every day.

The incidence of infection is particularly drastic in schools and nurseries. In the 5- to 14-year-old age group, the seven-day incidence level of 1,021 is already in the four-digit range. In the last four weeks, 468 outbreaks at nurseries and 1,265 outbreaks at schools were reported to the RKI—values that are far higher than in all previous waves. And the statistics do not yet include the last two weeks.

In North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), Germany’s most populous state, the number of infections at kindergartens more than doubled from 504 to 1,096 within one week. Later reports mean this number will also increase.

In Leipzig, a health office explained that due to the high incidence of infection, at times, children and nursery staff were no longer sent into quarantine in the event of positive cases. Since almost 20 nurseries are currently affected, the health department simply cannot manage to process infection cases until two to three days after the test results are available. In some cases, one-sixth of all staff in nurseries have already been infected.

The number of deaths among children and adolescents is also increasing. So far, “35 validated COVID-19 deaths among under-20s have been reported to the RKI,” the institute writes in its latest weekly report.

Yet schools and nurseries are to remain open at all costs. “It must now be our top priority to keep nurseries and schools open,” said German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD) in a video address to the 10th German Congress of School Principals on Friday.

In Saxony, where the incidence rate among 5- to 14-year-olds is currently around 3,080, the Education Ministry writes on its web page on the Coronavirus School and Nursery Ordinance, “Despite restrictions in public life: schools and nurseries remain open.”

In the same way, the Ministry of Education in Bavaria, where the incidence rate among 5- to 14-year-olds is 1,330, declares that schools will remain open—explicitly “also in regional hotspots.”

Baden-Württemberg’s Minister President Winfried Kretschmann (Greens) also announced that schools should remain open “as long as possible.” In the southern German state, the incidence rate among 5- to 14-year-olds is 1,130.

In NRW, Health Minister Karl-Josef Laumann (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) claimed on Tuesday that the rising coronavirus numbers would have no effect on attendance—a bold-faced lie aimed at justifying the CDU-FDP state government’s criminal policy of deliberate mass infection. In NRW, even the compulsory wearing of masks in classrooms has been dropped for the last month. Since then, the number of infections among schoolchildren has increased fivefold.

Last week, the school policy spokesperson for the FDP parliamentary group in NRW triggered a wave of outrage on Twitter. She had called for cases to be reported to her where teachers were exerting “moral pressure or peer pressure” on students about wearing masks. The week before, NRW Education Minister Yvonne Gebauer (FDP) had already

warned against exerting pressure on students to continue wearing masks in class.

In Hamburg, ruled by the SPD and Greens, the state is also relaxing protective measures. School Senator (state minister) Ties Rabe (SPD), for example, declared that in the future, there would be no contact tracing at schools if only one child was infected. At the same time, only the infected person would have to be quarantined. The rest of the class, including those sitting immediately adjacent, could continue to attend classes.

“I don’t think it’s appropriate at all at this point to talk about further school restrictions,” Rabe said. Rabe believes even minimal measures, such as extended Christmas vacations or a suspension of compulsory in-person attendance—which so far only a few states with the highest incidence rates have adopted—are wrong. Schools are “one of the safest places in the pandemic,” he claimed provocatively.

The mass infection policy in the interests of the financial markets is also supported by the trade unions. “The GEW believes it is right to keep schools and nurseries open in the coronavirus pandemic,” reads a statement on the official website of the Education and Science Union on November 19.

While all the bourgeois parties and the unions are driving through a reckless herd immunity policy, resistance is growing among parents, students, teachers and scientists. In a poll conducted as part of broadcaster ZDF’s political barometer report at the end of November, 52 percent of all respondents said that the state’s coronavirus measures “should be tougher.” Only 15 percent described the existing measures as “excessive.”

There was a high risk of “losing control of the pandemic at schools,” Heinz-Peter Meidinger, president of the German Teachers’ Association, warned the Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland. He said the governments responsible were putting their own political desires ahead of scientific expertise. “We can’t just accept this as if nothing were wrong. This is all the more true since there are also cases of Long Covid among children.”

Scientists are speaking out clearly about what is needed. “If policy-makers want to get anything done now, they need to act fast: Hard lock-downs and schools closed—that’s the only thing that can still help,” explains Professor Markus Scholz from the University of Leipzig, for example. The current measures were far from sufficient, he said. Last year, there were much harsher interventions at lower incidences, “And it took eight weeks for the numbers to drop.”

Scholz expects 2,500 to 5,000 additional deaths in the next few weeks in Saxony alone. A major driver of this, he said, was schools. “Until now, the entire school and youth sector

has remained excluded from the measures. Although it is precisely there that the infection figures are particularly high. We’ve been talking about air filters for a year, but they’re still missing almost across the board.”

In July 2021, the German government had allocated €200 million on paper for mobile air filters. So far, however, not a single euro has been called upon. Many schools are not in a position to raise the contribution they are required to make. In addition, air filters are only subsidized for classrooms in which the windows “can only be tilted” and in which children under the age of 12 are present. Education officials estimate the percentage of eligible classrooms is about 10 percent.

The lack of protective equipment in classrooms, as well as the murderous reopening policy in general, stem from deliberate political decisions. Politicians of all the bourgeois parties have worked throughout the pandemic by downplaying the virus, organising cover-ups, spreading falsifications, and misinformation to keep businesses open under deadly conditions and to ensure the maximization of profits.

Under these conditions, the Global Workers’ Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic initiated by the *World Socialist Web Site* is of enormous significance. The task of the Inquest is to investigate the disastrous response of governments, corporations and the media to the coronavirus outbreak. It will uncover the political and economic forces and interests behind the policies that have allowed the virus to spread unchecked and have led to a catastrophic pandemic that has already claimed millions of lives worldwide.

At the same time, the initiative will arm workers and youth with a programme to end mass deaths. This requires building independent rank-and-file committees that will take the fight against the pandemic into their own hands and implement all scientifically necessary measures to contain and eliminate COVID-19. First and foremost, this includes closing schools and non-essential production with full financial support—in combination with mass vaccination, strict contact tracing and the isolation of infected individuals.



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