

German officials cut back on contact tracing and testing amid largest COVID-19 wave

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All parties in Germany's federal parliament, the Bundestag, are cooperating closely to remove the remaining obstacles to the pandemic and to infect the population with the Omicron variant of the coronavirus. The decisions taken by the federal and state governments on Monday proved this once again.

While the number of new infections every day is rising almost vertically and the seven-day nationwide infection rate almost exceeds 1,000 per 100,000 inhabitants, the federal and state governments declared a de facto end to general contact tracing and a restriction of access to PCR tests. This comes on the heels of their move to curtail quarantine periods for infected people.

The decision, agreed to by all state governments and the federal government, does not provide for any additional contact restrictions and no lockdown measures. Instead, the last remaining measures that could limit the spread of infections were cut back.

For example, PCR tests will only be used for staff, "particularly in hospitals, in doctors' practices, in nursing homes, supported living facilities," and for high-risk patients. The specifics are to be determined by the health ministers. However, it is already clear that all other workers, students and day-care center children will at most be tested with rapid antigen tests, which are much less reliable, especially with the Omicron variant. This will inevitably lead to thousands of additional infections because infections will go undetected.

The agreement also stated that there should be "prioritization"—meaning a cutback—with regard to contact tracing due to the fact that the minister presidents refuse to increase staff numbers in the overburdened local health authorities. The details should be worked out "promptly," the document noted.

At the weekend, the health ministers of the federal states already agreed to focus contact tracing on COVID-19 cases in hospitals, the care sector, and facilities that provide integration assistance for people with disabilities.

The Minister Presidents Conference, the official title for the meeting between the heads of Germany's 16 states and the federal chancellor, calls on all other citizens to "take responsibility for informing their own contact persons and use the available electronic tools for contact tracing." In concrete terms, this means that workers in most areas will no longer receive a quarantine certificate from the local health department, and can therefore no longer formally prove an absence to their employer.

In Berlin, the Social Democrat/Left Party/Green state government coalition, the so-called red-red-green Senate, has already started to implement the measures. School and children in day care who have had initial contact with a coronavirus-infected person are no longer quarantined, but are only tested with unreliable rapid antigen tests. Parents can no longer request leave from their employer and go into quarantine at home because they no longer receive proof. In the midst of the most severe COVID-19 wave to date, schools, day care and businesses are being deliberately turned into breeding grounds for the virus.

Contradicting the last summit decision, the latest agreement stipulated that only ten days of isolation for infected people now apply in hospitals, care facilities and supported living facilities, which can be ended after seven days, provided someone has been symptom-free for 48 hours and returns a negative rapid antigen test. The same applies to contact persons, although there is no longer any quarantine requirement for persons who have received a booster vaccine, even though it has

been proven that they can transmit the virus.

The staging of “major national events,” including football matches and large concerts, is to be further simplified by “harmonizing the existing regulations.” A general vaccine mandate will only be “prepared” and “discussed” for the first time in the Bundestag next week.

At the press conference after the meeting, Chancellor Olaf Scholz stated that “the direction we have taken is helping.” All heads of government are of the opinion that it is “right to continue on this course.” The plans of the Federal Ministry of Health under Karl Lauterbach (Social Democrats, SPD) assume that the government’s policy in the “best-case scenario” will result in 400,000 new infections every day by mid-February.

The policy of mass infection, which is being pushed by all parties in the Bundestag, means not only the infection of millions, the death of hundreds of thousands, and long-term health damage for millions, but also the imminent collapse of the health care system.

Even the federal government’s expert council—including the head of Germany’s infectious disease agency (RKI), Lothar Wieler, and several virologists and epidemiologists—expects “a large number of hospital admissions” in its latest statement and assumes “that medical care will be restricted at least regionally.” According to the experts, this will result in “relevant risks” for the “care of patients with other diseases.”

From a scientific point of view, the only alternative, to save hundreds of thousands of lives, is to eliminate the virus through global vaccination, the coordinated lockdown of all non-essential businesses and schools, and other public health measures. Affected workers should be paid full wages and families provided with necessary support.

But the traffic light coalition of the SPD, Greens and Free Democrats is doing the exact opposite: flanked by state governments of all stripes, they are intensifying the profit-before-life policy of the previous grand coalition government, in the course of which the ten richest German billionaires doubled their wealth to more than 226 billion euros. The additional wealth amassed by these ten individuals during the pandemic alone corresponds to the total wealth of the poorest 33 million Germans.

Meanwhile, in schools and day care centers, children from up to thirty households are crammed together every day in a confined space under completely unsafe conditions, where they receive inferior tests for the virus. In the workplaces of industrial and commercial businesses, workers breathe the same virus-laden air, infecting friends, colleagues and relatives.

The federal and state governments are reacting to the overwhelming of the COVID-19 test capacity and the impending collapse of the health system by shortening quarantine times, forcing infected people to work and infecting young people even faster than before.

Both Bavaria’s Prime Minister Markus Söder (Christian Social Union) and Federal Minister of Health Lauterbach have already promised further “relaxations” in order to further increase the profits of the capitalists at the expense of the lives and health of workers and young people.

Resistance to this policy of ongoing mass infection is growing worldwide. In the US, France and Italy, tens of thousands of teachers have taken strike action in recent weeks for safe education. In Greece and Austria, schoolchildren have organized mass school strikes and occupations to protect themselves from infection.

These struggles are part of the worldwide upsurge of the class struggle. The fight to end the pandemic—on the basis of a global strategy for the elimination of COVID-19—is proving more and more clearly to be a struggle between two irreconcilable social forces: the capitalist class, which literally walks over mountains of corpses for its profit, and the working class, which must turn to a socialist program to defend the health and life of all.



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