

German federal government preparing abolition of coronavirus safety measures

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As the rate of coronavirus infections reaches ever new heights and the even more infectious Omicron subvariant BA.2 spreads, the German government is moving to end the last existing measures to protect against the virus. In so doing it is following the example of the US and other European countries.

The 7-day incidence is now 1,472 infections (per 100,000 residents), with 240,000 people recently infected in a single day. In every district of Germany the incidence rate exceeds 500. In 342 counties it stands above 1,000 and in 48 counties above 2,000. The highest incidence is in the county of Eichstätt, with an incidence value of 3,897.

The growing number of infections is accompanied by a disastrous increase in cases occurring in hospitals and nursing homes. Just last week there were 174 outbreaks in medical treatment facilities (20 more than in the previous week) and 373 outbreaks in nursing homes and homes for the elderly (127 more than in the previous week).

The number of severe outbreaks also continues to rise. On Friday, more than 1,750 people were hospitalized. The adjusted hospitalization incidence is now about 11 (weekly hospitalizations per 100,000 residents), doubling in one month. The percentage of free intensive care beds remains just above 10 percent, which is considered the borderline of hospital response capacity. Nearly 1,000 people have died since the week began.

Schools remain a central driver of infection. Among 15- to 34-year-olds, the 7-day incidence is 1,988, whereas among 5- to 14-year-olds it is as high as 4,187. For the past four weeks, 2,124 coronavirus outbreaks have been reported in schools, with that figure expected to rise as late reports come in. The number of school outbreaks is thus four times higher than at the height of

outbreaks last school year.

Of particular concern is the rapid spread of Omicron subvariant BA.2, which has seen its share of infections increase fivefold since the beginning of the year. It is currently believed to be 30 percent more infectious than BA.1 and can reinfect people within weeks of a BA.1 Omicron infection.

The ruling class is responding to this wave of infections by announcing even more comprehensive steps to reopen and even promising an end to all remaining pandemic safety measures. The federal and state governments are vying with each other to open fastest.

In his inaugural speech in the Bundesrat (federal council) on Friday, Chancellor Olaf Scholz (Social Democrats, SPD) declared that “the peak of the wave is in sight,” despite exploding case numbers. “That lets us consider a first reopening step at the federal-state meeting next week, as well as others for the spring.”

Scholz justified this with the absurd claim that “especially elderly citizens have fortunately not been strongly affected by the Omicron wave.” In view of hundreds of outbreaks in old people’s homes every week, this statement can only be regarded a brazen lie. In the last week alone, 660 people over the age of 60 have died from the coronavirus.

At the same time, the chancellor openly admits that nurses and doctors are working at their limits and tries to spin as a success that the health care system has not collapsed: “Our health care system—despite great strain on doctors and hospital staff—has held up so far.”

While Scholz announces steps toward reopening in the spring, other parts of his government want to reopen earlier. The current infection control measures remain in effect until March 20. After that, the Bundestag will vote on whether to extend them for

another three months. Liberal (FDP) parliamentary group leader Christian Dürr told the *Funke Mediengruppe* newspapers that any remaining protective measures should be lifted at that time: “On March 20, Germany should return to normal.”

But looser restrictions are needed before then, he told ARD and ZDF’s *Morgenmagazin*. One should focus on creating a “smooth transition” to March 20 with gradual relaxations, he said. First to fall should be vaccination (or proof of recovery) requirements in retail, contact tracing and contact restrictions for private gatherings.

While federal government officials are still just talking about relaxations, the states are already implementing them. Last week, all German states uniformly decided to raise the cap on the number of spectators allowed at large outdoor events to 10,000. The state governments of Schleswig-Holstein and Hesse announced an end to vaccination-or-recovered regulations across the retail sector. Now more and more states are following suit.

Bavaria, which is currently the state with the highest incidence, announced it would lift the curfew in pubs and further increase the maximum number of spectators at major events. For sporting events, 15,000 instead of 10,000 spectators will be allowed and the maximum occupancy rate will be raised from 25 percent to 50 percent. For cultural events, occupancy will even be increased from 50 percent to 75 percent.

After Schleswig-Holstein and Hesse, the states of Berlin and Brandenburg have now also announced that they will overturn the vaccination-or-recovered regulation in the retail sector. In Brandenburg, the night-time curfew for unvaccinated people in hotspot regions is also to be dropped.

Implementing this relaxation of safety regulations contradicts all scientific reasoning and risks thousands of deaths. Klaus Reinhardt, president of the German Medical Association, warned in an interview with the *Neue Osnabrücker Zeitung* against relaxation of regulations: “We still lack reliable and comprehensive data on the current incidence of infection. That makes it difficult to clearly assess the situation.”

Resistance to this policy is growing. An online petition by more than 100 student representatives calling the government’s “current mass-infection plan” “irresponsible and lacking solidarity” has now received

134,000 signatures. Under the hashtag #WirWerdenLaut (#We’reGettingLoud), a great number of students, teachers, parents and scientists are calling for “fighting the pandemic by any means necessary” and are making a number of demands, such as equipping schools with air filters, free FFP2 masks and a repeal of compulsory attendance.

Politicians and the media have responded with a smear campaign to denounce the petition’s legitimate demands as unscientific or a “scare campaign.”

The petition is an important expression of opposition to the profits-before-life policies of the ruling class. But their demands cannot be implemented by appealing to those in power. For two years now, those powers have ignored all such appeals, making it clear that they are pursuing policies in the interest of maximizing the profits of banks and corporations rather than protecting the health and lives of the population.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) recently wrote in a statement :

“Instead of appealing to the establishment parties, who make it clear day after day that our lives are worth nothing to them, students and teachers must organise independently in rank-and-file committees for safe education, taking the fight into their own hands and immediately implementing the safety measures mentioned in the petition.

“School strikes and student protests must be the prelude to a full-scale rebellion of the entire working class against the policy of deliberate mass infection.”

Write to us to discuss and organize the struggle against the pandemic and the building of independent rank-and-file committees!



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