

Germany's federal and state governments decide to scrap pandemic measures

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Wednesday's conference of Germany's federal and state governments has laid the basis for a devastating intensification of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the high point to date of the Omicron wave, the representatives of the "traffic light" federal coalition government and the state minister presidents have agreed to eliminate all remaining measures apart from mask mandates in certain public places.

The agreement stipulates that by the official start of spring, March 20, 2022, all "substantial protective measures" are to be lifted. The protective measures that have been in place up to now—such as access restrictions to retail stores and restaurants, the obligation in some areas for employees to work from home, and the requirement that people in workplaces either be vaccinated, recently recovered from an infection or in possession of a recent negative test—are to expire as planned and will not be extended any further.

As a first step, all private contact restrictions for vaccinated and recovered people will be lifted as of Friday. In retail, the so-called 2G rule, which allows only people who are vaccinated or recently recovered to enter many stores, will be abolished nationwide, and the requirement to wear an FFP2 (N95) mask will be removed.

From March 4, 2022, the access restrictions to restaurants and hotels will be relaxed to allow access to people with a current negative test, as well as those who are vaccinated or recently recovered. Discos and clubs will open to all guests with a same-day test or booster vaccination. Where the 2G or 2GPlus rule applies, requiring vaccinated or recovered persons to present in addition a current negative test in order to gain access, the "maximum capacity" rules will be adjusted for "major national events," including football matches. Up to 6,000 people will be allowed indoors, and up to 25,000 outdoors.

The federal government's Council of Experts, which includes scientists and other government advisers, sanctioned the "relaxation" of the measures, but warned in a statement that there will be a greater need for "intensive care for people aged over 60 years," and increased risk of the "spreading of new virus variants." It added that the course of the pandemic "cannot be precisely predicted."

Due to the "probably even more infectious" Omicron sub-variant BA.2, a "longer wave or a rebound of infections

compared to the estimates for BA.1" must be anticipated, the paper noted. "As part of any reopening steps," it continued, "unvaccinated and older people at risk of a severe infection will be increasingly involved in the infection process." Additional major "waves of infection" can be expected by autumn at the latest.

The days leading up to the most recent federal-state conference were marked by a reactionary, anti-scientific campaign. This culminated in Federal Minister of Health Karl Lauterbach (Social Democrats-SPD) removing decisions on the length of the so-called recovered status from the Robert Koch Institute (RKI), Germany's infectious disease agency.

A person's "recovered status" refers to the period of time during which he or she is considered, for the purposes of public health restrictions, to have immunity from the virus. In the future, "determinations on the status of vaccinated and recovered" individuals should no longer be delegated to the scientific institutes of the federal government, he declared.

Following the latest scientific findings, the RKI had reduced the immunity period after an infection from six months to three months without taking into account the interests of big business. Free Democratic (FDP) politicians and right-wing media commentators demanded that RKI head Lothar Wieler be "disempowered." A report by the scientific service of the federal parliament even expressed "doubts" that the actions of the RKI met "constitutional standards."

On the talk show "Anne Will" on Sunday, Lauterbach summed up the capitalist programme of endless pandemic. Looking ahead to "completely different variants in autumn," it was, he explained, "important to recognise that things will no longer be the same as before COVID-19."

He continued: "The world has gotten a little worse. We have a virus that is more contagious and dangerous than the flu. The idea that this is now becoming increasingly harmless and will soon become a cold is a very dangerous legend. That may be the case in 30 or 40 years, but not for the next 10 years."

This is what the man believes who, as minister of health, bears direct responsibility for the scrapping of protective measures!

Lauterbach is risking the deaths of hundreds of thousands because the capitalists refuse even temporarily to put aside their

selfish profit interests. The example of China shows that the virus can still be stopped through a scientific elimination strategy, including coordinated lockdowns and public investments to fight the pandemic. If the same policy had been followed in China as in Germany, well over 2 million inhabitants would have died, compared to the 4,636 deaths China has recorded.

In Germany, the policy of allowing everything that does not result in the complete and immediate collapse of the health system has caused immeasurable misery. In just the three weeks since the last “Coronavirus Summit,” 3,476 people have officially died of COVID-19. Since November 9, there has only been a single day when fewer than 140 people died from the virus. The official death toll of 120,227 people since the pandemic began is roughly the equivalent of completely wiping out a mid-sized city like Wolfsburg or Göttingen.

Since the number of deaths fell in January, partly due to booster vaccinations, this trend has reversed in recent days and is now threatening to parallel the explosion of infections. At 11.73 per 100,000 inhabitants, the rate of hospital admissions is at the RKI’s highest warning level and has again increased massively in the oldest and youngest age groups (+1.75 and +0.35, respectively, compared to the previous week).

According to official figures, some 320 people have on average died per day in France, with a maximum of more than 650 deaths. If one adjusts the number of deaths in France, Israel or Denmark, which are a few days or weeks ahead of developments in Germany, for population size, one can assume that Germany will soon record at least 500 deaths per day, despite vaccinations.

Mass death on this scale, which, according to a report in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), is projected in the pandemic plans of the Ministry of Health, would be comparable to the worst days of the so-called Delta wave last winter.

The epidemiologist Marc Lipsitch and his team at the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health presented new figures on excess mortality in a preprint study, according to which some 135,000 adults died of COVID-19 in the US between June and early December 2021 because they were not vaccinated. Of the nearly 1,000 preventable deaths every day, one in six was under the age of 50.

Turning to the impact of the Omicron variant, the FAZ recalled that in just under two months, half a million people, most of whom were not vaccinated, have died worldwide.

An article in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* makes it clear that talk of the Omicron variant being “mild” is specious. “Omicron has a supposed mild effect because the vaccinations protect against severe symptoms so well,” Oliver Keppler, head of virology at Munich’s Ludwig Maximilian University, told the newspaper.

Markus Wörnle, who heads the central emergency room at Munich University Hospital downtown, added, “The patients who have to be hospitalized because of a COVID infection are usually older patients with previous illnesses, or patients with

no or insufficient vaccination protection.”

The “pathogen, which is deadly for many people” is still associated with severe pneumonia and causes Long COVID, the consequences of which “cannot yet be seriously quantified,” according to Keppler. The virologist added: “The label ‘mild’ is disastrous.”

According to British data, even among vaccinated infected people, the hospitalization rate is 1.9 percent. Two million Germans over the age of 60 are still unvaccinated.

But although the science editors of the major newspapers—as well as the federal and state governments—are well informed of the facts of the Omicron catastrophe, large sections of the media support the policy of mass infection and even fuel it. A particularly repulsive role in this campaign is played by the daily newspaper *Die Welt*, which now publishes vicious articles on a daily basis denouncing students, parents and teachers who oppose the policy of mass infection.

A recent *Die Welt* article titled “The Lockdown Advocate Conspiracy Theory” angrily notes that “a movement is growing on the pro-lockdown side that ... accuses the open school state and its actors of seriously planned mass assault.”

According to the author, Verena Weidenbach, a growing part of the “No COVID faction” criticizes the “social Darwinist ‘planned mass infection’ of ‘defenseless children,’” views “the state’s alleged ‘mass infection policy’ as an expression of neoliberal-capitalist selection logic,” and associates it with “eugenics programs” and the “Nazis’ murder of the disabled.”

This perspective, the author warns, is part of “worrying processes of alienation and radicalization” that are associated with “considerable potential for the mobilisation of fundamental opposition.”



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