

German government abolishes free coronavirus testing

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While both the number of infections and hospitalizations in Germany are rising rapidly again, the government is giving the virus free rein and dismantling the last remaining coronavirus measures.

On Friday, Health Minister Karl Lauterbach (Social Democratic Party, SPD) announced the end of free public testing. A few days earlier, he had presented a vague 7-point plan to combat the impending autumn wave, focusing on vaccinations and testing. Now, it is clear that even these areas will not be expanded, but cut back further.

Starting July 1, a test at a public testing station will cost three euros. Only vulnerable groups, such as children up to five years old, women in early pregnancy and visitors to hospitals and nursing homes, will still be tested free of charge.

The consequences of the decision are broad. For many who must test regularly, it means a considerable financial burden that workers and the socially disadvantaged in particular can hardly afford.

With the abolition of free testing, the already inadequate data on the actual level of infections will be even less robust. Lauterbach himself revealed that only about half of coronavirus infections were being recorded. Without free testing, the number of unreported cases will rise even further.

'I will make no secret of it, I would have liked to continue the free tests for all,' Lauterbach explained cynically. The decision is in line with the policies the "traffic light" coalition of the SPD, Liberal Democrats (FDP) and Greens has followed since taking office. It has ended all remaining protections, essentially putting into practice the demands of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD).

Lauterbach justifies the abolition of free tests with "the tight budget situation that awaits us in the

autumn." The "truth" is that the tests "unfortunately cannot be afforded," he said.

Who is Lauterbach trying to fool? The federal government has just launched a "special fund for the Bundeswehr" of €100 billion to spend on rearmament. It is simply not willing to spend the money on coronavirus tests and other health and protection measures. Instead, these costs will be passed on to the working class, which is already struggling with rising heating, rent and food costs.

The decision makes clear the government will take no further action, even under conditions of a massive new wave of infections. Ending free testing not only eliminates the basis for reintroducing limited measures such as requiring a negative test result for entry into some public venues, the entire "Autumn Coronavirus Strategy" does not include a single mandatory protective measure.

Its seven points focus largely on a vaccination campaign and the procurement of vaccines adapted to the Omicron variant. However, Lauterbach has already ruled out a renewed push for mandatory vaccination, even though the majority of the population would support it. One looks in vain for terms such as "lockdown" or even "mandatory masking." Instead, the document explicitly states, "Nurseries and schools must remain open."

The seventh point refers to an "amendment to the Infection Protection Act," which expires on September 23. New measures would thus not come into force until the end of September at the earliest, if at all. Lauterbach said he was in talks about this with Federal Justice Minister Marco Buschmann (FDP). Buschmann is notorious for regularly campaigning in AfD style against the least protective measures.

As recently as June 15, he stated on the *Maischberger*

talk show, “We must not underestimate what excessive, misapplied measures do to society. Our goal must be to combine health protection with our identity as a free society.” By “freedom,” the FDP representative means the unrestricted accumulation of profits, even if it costs millions of lives.

In essence, Lauterbach stands for the same “profits before lives” policy that has been followed since the start of the pandemic. A few days ago, in an interview with Deutschlandfunk radio, he said, “I believe that we all have the same goal here: to be able to react quickly with as few restrictions on freedom as possible—adapted to the situation.”

At the same time, the government is aware that its policies are conjuring up another autumn with very high death rates. At the press conference following the state health ministers' conference, Lauterbach declared, “Unfortunately, we must reckon with a severe coronavirus wave. The summer wave has already started now, but it will be more difficult in the autumn.”

The federal government’s strategy paper lists three possible scenarios elaborated by its Coronavirus Expert Council. The second scenario is considered the most likely: “The disease burden caused by SARS-CoV-2 remains similar to the recent increases in Omicron variants BA.4, BA.5, and BA.2.12.1, with a clustered occurrence of infections and work absences throughout the colder season.” In fact, this scenario has already become a reality.

According to the Robert Koch Institute, the more infectious BA.4 and BA.5 variants already account for 56 percent of infections, with a massive increase in those affected—despite the present warm temperatures. At 618 infections per 100,000 inhabitants, the 7-day incidence rate is about 23 percent higher than a week ago. The virus is spreading particularly rapidly among the elderly. Last week, there were 119 outbreaks in nursing homes and homes for the elderly—25 more than a week ago. A total of 50 people have died.

The number of severe outcomes is also increasing in the general population. The adjusted incidence of hospitalizations rose to seven (per 100,000) last week, or about 5,500 hospitalizations per week. The number of patients receiving intensive care rose to 780 from 670 the previous week.

To date, more than 140,000 people have died from

COVID-19 in Germany due to the government’s refusal to eliminate the virus through implementing the necessary scientific and public health measures. Many more deaths will follow if the ruling class has its way. According to the government’s strategy paper, the “most likely autumn coronavirus scenario” could “extend over a long period of time.” Thus, “without taking further measures, about 1,500 coronavirus deaths per week are to be assumed.”



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