

Coronavirus in Germany: Infection and death rates explode during summer months

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Although the number of coronavirus infections in Germany is exploding during the summer months, hospitals are filling up and an even bigger wave is looming for the fall, the Bundestag (federal parliament) has gone into summer recess until September without adopting any protective measures against the spread of the virus.

Currently there are about 1.8 million people in Germany infected with the disease and the 7-day incidence rate is 679 (infections per 100,000 people). In the state of Saarland and 59 counties, the incidence is over 1,000, meaning that 1 percent of the population there is freshly infected every week. In the district of Wittmund, the incidence is 2,290, and in the district of Wunsiedel it is as high as 2320, where the incidence tripled within a week's time.

And even this is a suppressed incidence rate due to the summer vacation season. With the end of the summer holidays, there is a real threat of further increases due to the return of travelers and the start of school. Furthermore, those who have already suffered infection this year are at risk of reinfection.

Hajo Zeeb of the Leibniz Institute for Prevention Research and Epidemiology in Bremen warned in the news magazine *Der Spiegel*: "We are dealing with variants with a high immune escape potential. So you can't feel particularly safe regarding infections in the winter if you were infected during the summer, since there are clearly reinfections."

The official figures themselves represent an inadequate reflection of the actual incidence of infection. First, mandatory testing in many areas as well as testing capacity have been restricted and free testing has been abolished. Second, many of those infected no longer have a PCR test conducted, yet only these tests count in the statistics. In recent weeks, the

rate of positive test results exploded from a very high 28.4 percent in the 21st calendar week to 53.7 percent in the 27th week. A high rate of positive tests indicates a high number of unidentified infections.

Vulnerable groups have been increasingly affected by the massive rise in contagion. Outbreaks have been growing for weeks in both medical treatment facilities and nursing homes. In the former there were 157 outbreaks last week, up from 108 the previous week; 12 people died. In nursing homes and homes for the elderly, there were 300 outbreaks (235 the previous week), with 58 deaths.

Hospitals are again filling up. The adjusted hospitalization incidence is now 12.5, which corresponds to over 10,000 hospitalizations per week. Just a month ago, this figure was only half as high.

Likewise, the number of patients surviving on intensive care is on the rise. Currently, there are 1,330, compared to 1,238 a week ago. The number of COVID-19 patients treated in hospitals is currently twice as high as in the previous summers. The number of COVID-19 deaths is also rising. According to Johns Hopkins University data, the 7-day average doubled from 53 on June 17 to 104 on July 25. This means that more than 700 people are dying per week.

An additional burden is the high rate of sick leave among hospital workers and the high number of absences due to infection and quarantine. Gerald Gaß, chairman of the board of the German Hospital Association, told the *Funke Mediengruppe* newspapers, "In many hospitals, scheduled operations have had to be postponed and, at times, entire areas have had to be shut down."

The situation is particularly dramatic at the Würzburg University Hospital. Currently, 59 COVID-19 patients are being treated there and six others are in intensive

care, more than at any time since the beginning of the pandemic. A week ago, there were 47 infected patients and two weeks ago 39. Due to the high workload, the hospital management has already announced that scheduled treatments may be postponed in all areas.

If the situation at the clinics is already dire, it will become catastrophic in the fall. Gaß warned, “The numbers make it clear that the fall could again be an extreme stress test for the clinics.”

The chairman of the World Medical Association, Frank Ulrich Montgomery, told *Funke Mediengruppe* that he has called for the possibility of lockdowns to be included in the new Infection Protection Act: “Anyone who categorically rules out measures such as contact restrictions or lockdowns from the outset has neither understood the meaning of the law nor grasped the seriousness of the situation.”

The government is entirely aware of the consequences of its coronavirus policy. Federal Health Minister Karl Lauterbach (SPD) recently said, “If we went into the fall as we are now, that is, without further protective measures, without masks, without anything, it would mean that the number of cases would rise sharply, as well as that the intensive care units would be overloaded.”

He added, “It’s like a candle burning at both ends: staff burning away at the bottom and patients burning away at the top.” If appropriate measures were not put in place soon, he said, the population would face a “catastrophic” pandemic development.

As Minister of Health, Lauterbach is the individual responsible for taking appropriate action. In fact, he is doing just the opposite, dismantling nearly all the protective measures that still remain in place.

His tenure in office includes the government’s decision to end the epidemic state of emergency, the new Infection Protection Act that had been in effect since March and provides only “basic protection,” the rejection of general mandatory vaccination, the reduction of the quarantine period to five days and the end of free testing.

Health Minister Lauterbach explicitly did not adopt any safety measures for the current summer wave, rather only recommended wearing masks indoors and a fourth vaccination for people with many contacts. So far, the federal government’s planned “Coronavirus Autumn Strategy” does not include a single mandatory

measure, instead focusing on a vaccination campaign and the procurement of updated vaccines.

In fact, the spread of the highly contagious and immune-resistant BA.5 Omicron variant, which already accounts for 87 percent of infection incidence, shows that it is impossible to combat the virus in the long term with vaccination alone. As the virus spreads unchecked, more and more dangerous variants are emerging.

The societal impact is extremely far-reaching. Tens of thousands are suffering long-term consequences from Long COVID and the mass deaths to date have also led to a significant decline in average life expectancy in Germany. Officially, more than 143,000 people have succumbed to the virus. The Federal Statistical Office calculated that life expectancy for girls born in 2021 has fallen by 0.4 years compared to those born in 2019, and by as much as 0.6 years for boys.

There is only one way to stop this social regression. What is required is the elimination of the virus through a combination of all scientifically warranted measures: lockdowns, a comprehensive vaccination campaign, mass testing and contact tracing. Since such elimination is incompatible with the profit interests of the ruling class under capitalism, the working class worldwide must unite and fight for the elimination of COVID-19 within the framework of socialist politics.



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