

Munich Oktoberfest emerges as COVID superspreader event in Germany

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While on average almost 80 people lose their lives to the pandemic every day in Germany and a new COVID wave is gathering pace, the federal and state governments are dismantling the last remaining measures and promoting a “live with the virus” strategy. The Oktoberfest—a super-spreading event par excellence—is only the most disturbing example of this policy.

Since September 17, the Oktoberfest has been taking place in Munich, where millions of people from countries around the world meet in tents without any COVID protection measures. The fact that this would lead to a mass spread of the virus was beyond question from the outset.

For example, Florian Geyer, head of the Miesbach health office in Upper Bavaria, where Munich is located, told the *Münchner Merkur* newspaper, “One thing is clear: a beer tent cannot be adequately ventilated. And it is an international meeting place—the best conditions for the virus to spread, mutate and change. Whether and how it will do that, we cannot predict.”

“Of course, this will lead to an increase in the number of cases,” said Johannes Bogner, senior consultant at the LMU Clinic at the University of Munich. And Munich virologist Oliver Keppler told regional public broadcaster BR, “On a scale of one to 10, the probability of SARS-CoV-2 exposure after several hours in the tent is, in my estimation, nine to 10.”

This coincides with the catastrophic consequences of similar festivals, which were celebrated in various parts of Bavaria without COVID restrictions. In Rosenheim, for example, the seven-day infection rate rose there to over 1,000 infections per 100,000 inhabitants approximately one-and-a-half weeks after the start of the Oktoberfest.

In Munich itself, the seven-day incidence has risen from 225 per 100,000 inhabitants to over 695 within 10 days. In the last week, more than 10,000 new COVID cases were reported, which is about 6,500 more than in

Hamburg, where the second highest number of cases were registered in the last seven days. PCR test samples have shown that 2 percent of Oktoberfest visitors are already infected at the event.

The federal and state governments are not only aware of this development, but are consciously promoting it. Numerous politicians of all parties have published pictures of themselves without a mask at the festival. According to the new Infection Protection Act, even minor requirements, such as access restrictions, mandatory hygiene and mask mandates, are no longer permitted. Bavarian Prime Minister Markus Söder (Christian Social Union, CSU) stated before the start of the Oktoberfest, “The number of infections will probably increase, that is the experience of previous festivals.”

The organisation of huge festivals without any protection serves above all one goal: “living” or rather “dying with the virus” is to be normalised. While in the US, President Biden recently described the pandemic as “over,” an increasing number of politicians in Germany are calling for the last remaining measures to be lifted.

For example, the spokesman for health policy of the Christian Democratic Union/CSU parliamentary group in the Bundestag, Tino Sorge, told *Der Spiegel*, “It is time to leave the tunnel of fear. More countries are returning to normality. With all due caution, the state of emergency must not become a permanent state. Our federal government will also have to explain to people how long we will be in pandemic mode.”

Andrew Ullmann, spokesman for health policy for the Free Democratic Party group, commented similarly, “I can absolutely understand what Joe Biden means. As a scientist and clinician, I would argue that the pandemic is not over yet, but it is in its final stages.”

Baden-Württemberg’s Green Party Minister President Winfried Kretschmann sees Germany in the “transition from the pandemic to endemic disease” and declared that

he does not consider any further protective measures necessary.

In addition, a few days ago, the federal states of Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Hesse and Schleswig-Holstein demanded in a joint letter that the obligation to isolate people infected with COVID be abandoned.

Baden-Württemberg's Minister of Health Manne Lucha (Greens) said, "We should gradually come into the mode of treating a coronavirus infection like another infectious disease in which the rule is: If you are ill, you stay at home."

These plans are already being implemented. On Wednesday, the Baden-Württemberg state government abolished compulsory isolation for children and young people after a coronavirus infection. Students can therefore return to school infected, without the need for a mask, and spread the virus among their classmates.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who was infected with the coronavirus a few days ago, has concentrated on sending the message that infected people can work. Scholz "isolated himself" in the Chancellery because he could "do a good job from here." In order to recover quickly, he took Paxlovid on the advice of his doctors. For the vast majority of the population, this coronavirus treatment is virtually unavailable.

Federal Health Minister Karl Lauterbach (Social Democrats) is busy downplaying the situation and agitating against serious measures. He only reckons with a 'medium-sized wave in autumn,' he explained in an interview with the *Rheinische Post*. Lockdowns were "no longer justifiable" and "closures of schools or the hospitality industry" would no longer be considered.

In fact, the situation is more serious than at the same time in recent years. After a slight decline in infections in recent weeks, cases are starting to rise again. The official 7-day incidence was 410 infections per 100,000 inhabitants on Thursday. A week ago it was 281.1. This means that the 7-day incidence has increased by 46 percent within a week. The number of current new infections is about four times as high as a year ago at the same time.

However, the true number of infections is much higher, as a large part of the test infrastructure has been dismantled and only PCR tests are included in the statistics. The enormous test positivity rate of 33.9 percent also illustrates the high number of unreported cases.

A growing number of infections occur in hospitals and nursing homes. Last week there were 51 outbreaks in medical treatment facilities (49 in the previous week) and

178 in retirement and nursing homes (120 in the previous week). Due to the outbreaks in recent weeks, at least 24 people have died in medical treatment facilities and 99 in retirement and nursing homes.

Overall, the number of severe outcomes following a COVID infection is increasing sharply again. Around 6,000 people are hospitalized every week, while 705 people are currently in intensive care units and around 80 people die every day. This is almost twice as high as a year ago at the same time.

Particularly concerning is the spread of the Omicron subvariant BA 2.75.2, which exhibits an unprecedented ability to evade immunity. According to assistant professor Ben Murell at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, both the Evusheld and sotrovimab COVID drug treatments show no significant effect on isolated samples of the mutation.

According to a study by a research group at the University of Beijing, the subvariant also easily prevails against the drug bebtelovimab. All three drugs consist of isolated antibodies, which are intended to trigger an immediate effect in the infected patient.

The emergence of new mutations illustrates the total bankruptcy of the official pandemic policy. As is becoming increasingly apparent, the mass infection of the population does not lead to more harmless mutations, but to the emergence of more infectious and resistant variants.

The only strategy to end the pandemic is to eliminate the virus. But since this is incompatible with the economic interests of the ruling class, it is necessary to build a socialist movement of the working class which prioritises the life and health of the population over the profits of the capitalists.



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