

As COVID surges in Germany, studies show more risks from infections for children

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16 October 2022

As a massive coronavirus wave develops in the autumn and hospitalization rates skyrocket, more and more studies are revealing the dangerous consequences of COVID infection, even for children.

The number of coronavirus infections in Germany has increased exponentially in recent weeks, with more than 100,000 people becoming infected daily. On Thursday alone, 145,000 infections were reported to the Robert Koch Institute (RKI). Just a week ago, an average of “only” 62,000 people were being infected every day. According to official figures, 1.4 million people in Germany are currently infected: about one in 60 inhabitants.

The actual figures are much higher. Only positive PCR tests are included in the RKI statistics. However, many people do not take a PCR test after a positive lateral flow test. The testing infrastructure and mandatory testing have been almost completely scaled back. The high positive test rate of 47.8 percent gives an indication of the high number of unreported cases.

As the number of infections increases, the number of those who experience a severe illness also skyrockets. The adjusted hospitalization incidence rate is now almost 20 per 100,000 inhabitants, which corresponds to 15,000 hospitalizations per week, meaning it has doubled in less than two weeks. At latest count, the number of people being treated in intensive care is 1,706.

The German Hospital Association (DKG) warns of hospitals becoming overloaded. Compared to the previous week, bed occupancy for those with COVID “increased by 50 percent,” the chairman of the board Gerald Gaß told *Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland*. Things will be “extremely difficult in the weeks ahead,” he said.

The drastic situation is the result of the government’s

policy of deliberately allowing the contagion to run wild. With the current Infection Protection Act, which came into force on October 1, the federal coalition government has eliminated almost all remaining protective measures. New measures—most notably lockdowns, such as the closure of schools—are now prevented by the law.

The president of the Standing Conference of State Education Ministers, Karin Prien (Christian Democratic Union, CDU), recently emphasized that as in all other areas of life, the motto “living with the virus” now applies to schools as well.

Recent studies on the long-term consequences of a coronavirus infection, especially for children, have revealed the criminal results of this policy. A recently published study by the Erlangen University Hospital, which examines the long-term consequences of COVID infections in children and adolescents, concludes that minors experience enormous changes to their lungs due to infection.

Through examinations with a special MRI, researchers determined that in study participants the air and blood flow of the lungs no longer functioned properly. “In the recovered group, the V/Q (ventilation/perfusion) ratio was 62 percent, and in the group with Long COVID, it was 60 percent—both a significantly lower value than the ratio of 81 percent in the healthy control subjects,” explained Dr. Ferdinand Knieling, a specialist in paediatrics and adolescent medicine at the Children’s Hospital at Erlangen University Hospital.

This means that the air and blood flow of those infected was significantly lower than in uninfected children and adolescents. How long ago the infection had occurred did not matter, according to Dr. Knieling; lung function was lower in all cases.

Another recent study by the University Hospital of Düsseldorf and health insurer AOK found that children from poor families had a significantly higher risk of contracting severe COVID-19 than children of wealthy families.

The study looked at the period from the beginning of the pandemic to July 2021, before the start of the Delta wave. Data from nearly 700,000 children and adolescents insured via the AOK were included, with 1,600 of them (0.2 percent) being hospitalized due to coronavirus.

The study found that children whose parents were unemployed or had low-paying jobs were 1.4 times more likely to be hospitalized. For children living in a deprived neighbourhood, the risk is as much as three times higher. Both figures are independent of pre-existing conditions—i.e., they emerge from social conditions.

The study is a follow-up to one in which the AOK looked at the risk of severe illness among the long-term unemployed in the early months of 2020. Using data from 1.3 million insured persons, the study concluded that recipients of unemployment benefit have a 17.5 percent increased risk of coronavirus-related hospitalization. Recipients of the lower unemployment benefit have an 84 percent increased risk. The results are independent of age and gender in both cases.

Official RKI figures also show a clear link between social status and deaths from COVID-19. During the second coronavirus wave in the winter of 2020/21, an average of about 45 out of 100,000 men and 30 out of 100,000 women died in wealthier population groups, whereas nearly 80 out of 100,000 men and about 40 out of 100,000 women died in poorer population groups.

“Social disparities have a significant impact on health outcomes. This is also evident in the Covid pandemic. But an individual’s health should not depend on social status,” Günter Wältermann, CEO of AOK Rheinland/Hamburg, said after the first study was published. “We have known for a long time that poverty and health are linked,” said Prof. Nico Dragano of Düsseldorf University Hospital.

In fact, poor men live on average 10 years less than rich ones. For women, the figure is eight years. Poor people also suffer more frequently from diabetes, cardiovascular disease and other illnesses. They often do not have the means to obtain adequate or optimal

medical treatment.

The pandemic has significantly exacerbated the class issues in health. Workers live predominantly in cramped housing conditions. Working from home is not possible for many, without a suitable room, sufficient space and adequate IT equipment, or a job that can be done remotely. The trade unions have also played a crucial role in forcing workers back to workplaces in unsafe conditions, where coronavirus outbreaks occur regularly.

In the last week alone, the RKI recorded 65 outbreaks in workplaces and 45 outbreaks in training centres. However, due to a lack of infrastructure and recording capabilities, the actual numbers are far higher.

The increasing knowledge about the dangerous consequences of COVID infections and the again exploding infection and death figures underline the criminal character of the policies of the ruling class: The health and life of the population are being sacrificed to capitalist profit interests. In Germany alone, more than 150,000 people have already succumbed to the virus.

To stop the mass deaths and implement the scientifically necessary measures to end the pandemic, the intervention of the working class, equipped with an international socialist program, is necessary.



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