

Surge in COVID-19 infections deepens crisis in Germany's hospitals

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The occupancy rate in Germany's hospitals due to rising coronavirus infections has doubled nationwide in just one week. In several federal states, intensive care units and emergency rooms are hopelessly overwhelmed. Beds cannot be used due to staff shortages, and many hospitals have opted out of offering emergency care.

The rapid surge of the pandemic in Germany and internationally is once again bringing hospitals, which have been operating at their limits for almost three years, to the brink of collapse. This development was not only predictable, it was consciously accepted. Despite the dangers for patients and workers, the federal and state governments are not prepared to implement even the most basic protective measures.

Gerald Gass, chairman of the German Hospital Association (DKG), recently reported that planned operations and treatments are already being postponed, and urgently needed beds are being left empty due to a lack of personnel. "These are things that are probably happening in half of the hospitals right now," Gass said. "And the situation is likely to deteriorate even further in the coming weeks."

According to the intensive care registry of the German Interdisciplinary Association for Intensive Care and Emergency Medicine (Divi), 1,660 patients with COVID-19 had to be treated in intensive care units as of October 11.

The Robert Koch Institute (RKI), Germany's central disease control agency, reports that there were 220 active outbreaks in medical facilities last week, compared with 155 the previous week. In elderly care and nursing homes, the number has risen from 301 to 413. "These developments can be interpreted as a direct consequence of the rapid spread [of COVID] in recent weeks," the report said.

In fact, the increase in hospital admissions reflects the dramatic increase in the overall number of infections, which has risen sharply. The seven-day incidence of infections per 100,000 inhabitants was reported by the RKI on Monday at 680. On the same day, the RKI reported 151,420 new infections. Experts assume that the number of infections is much higher, because many infected people no longer perform a PCR test and are therefore not recorded in the official statistics. The death toll is also rising sharply again. Between 100 and 200 people die from COVID-19 every day.

In Berlin, the Senate Health Department reported 904 patients with COVID-19 in hospitals across the German capital on Friday. Of these, 48 required intensive medical care. One week earlier, the number of hospitalised patients was 696, and a week prior to that 543.

The Berlin state government, consisting of the Social Democrats, Left Party and Greens—the so-called red-red-green Senate—continues to do nothing in the face of this development. The SPD, Greens and Left Party are currently discussing possible measures for the coming months, but the abolition of the so-called Covid traffic light warning system already makes it clear that the government is concerned above all with glossing over the increasing number of infections.

Health administrators claim that the "traffic light," which has been red virtually continuously throughout the last few months, is no longer the right instrument because current infections have less severe disease outcomes.

In Brandenburg, the number of cases in hospitals has increased tenfold compared to the same time last year. Last Tuesday, the Strausberg, Seelow and Wriezen hospitals again imposed a ban on visits in order to curb the spread. The seven-day incidence in the federal state

rose to 744.1 infections per 100,000 inhabitants, almost doubling compared to the previous week.

The Carl-Thiem-Klinikum Hospital in Cottbus is struggling to cope with the massive increase of patients and the simultaneous loss of staff due to COVID-19. Managing Director Götz Brodermann told the rbb on Thursday that the hospital was once again on the verge of a threshold at which wards had to be closed.

Brandenburg's Minister of the Interior and state leader of the Christian Democrats (CDU) Michael Stübgen nonetheless stated that the CDU/Green coalition state government would not take any measures to counteract this development. He said that measures "do not make sense" because he has no data suggesting that the health care system is overburdened.

Mehring Books, the publishing arm of the Socialist Equality Party (US), is proud to announce the publication in epub format of Volume 1 of *COVID, Capitalism, and Class War: A Social and Political Chronology of the Pandemic*, a compilation of the *World Socialist Web Site's* coverage of this global crisis.

The Hessenschau reported that of the 2,025 beds in normal wards kept available in the state of Hesse for COVID-19 patients, 1,922 were occupied on Friday, 500 more than a week earlier. A further 169 patients with COVID-19 were in intensive care. There, too, almost all of the 190 beds reserved for COVID-19 patients are occupied. The Ministry of Social Affairs reports "almost nationwide" supply shortages in internal and intensive care medicine.

The situation in the Bavarian capital of Munich and its surroundings is particularly severe. Two weeks after the end of the Oktoberfest in Munich, the warnings made by doctors and virologists have been proven correct.

Markus Lerch, medical director of the LMU Clinic in Munich, explained that there are now more Covid patients being treated than in any other wave. In addition, there are also staff absences. In some cases, 500 employees were sick at the same time.

The works council for the Munich Clinic, which operates five hospitals, warned in a letter to Munich Mayor Dieter Reiter (SPD) that the health care system in the city could collapse. "The emergency wards are overcrowded, the patients are piling up in the corridors," declared the damning letter. The hospitals

are "dangerously overcrowded," and 30 to 50 percent of the employees are themselves sick.

In some cases, patients in Munich and the surrounding area are transferred from hospital to hospital, depending on which institution still has capacity. The hospital in Haag in the district of Mühldorf am Inn has closed entirely until the end of January. The remaining staff have been deployed to other hospitals in the district.

In the city of Munich, the seven-day incidence on Thursday was 1,234 infections per 100,000 inhabitants, down from almost 1,500 infections two days earlier. In Fürstenfeldbruck, the corresponding rate was 1,474 infections, and in Ebersberg 1,253. Overall, the incidence in the state of Bavaria is over 1,000 infections per 100,000 inhabitants. Bavaria is also assumed to have a high number of unreported cases.



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