

German federal states abolish quarantine requirement for those infected with COVID

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Despite the continuing high numbers succumbing to COVID and a mounting flu wave, and with experts warning of a “twindemic,” governments at federal and state level are working to abolish the few remaining protective measures. This is shown by the decision of four federal states to eliminate the requirement for infected persons to go into quarantine.

At the end of last week, the state governments of Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Hesse and Schleswig-Holstein announced they would abolish the quarantine obligation. There was a need for “a new phase in dealing with the pandemic,” which was “in transition to being endemic,” the four states said in a joint statement on Friday.

Other states could soon follow suit. There were “good arguments that infected people without symptoms do not necessarily have to go into quarantine,” Berlin Health Senator (state minister) Ulrike Gote (Greens) said. Saxony, Rhineland-Palatinate and Thuringia, led by the Left Party, also hinted they were thinking along similar lines.

The decision can only be described as criminal. It removes the last block on the permanent infection of the population, with catastrophic consequences for the health and lives of millions.

The requirement for infected persons to observe a five-day quarantine period is currently one of the few remaining protective measures against the unhindered spread of the virus. Lifting it means that the infected can carry the virus into schools, workplaces, buses and trains, where it is then further spread. The date for the abolition of the quarantine requirement in Bavaria is set for November 16.

Bavarian state Prime Minister and Christian Social Union Chairman Markus Söder had already announced the abolition of the quarantine rules at the beginning of

November in the *Augsburger Allgemeine*: “We are firmly convinced that the quarantine rules must be adapted. I believe that we are now in an endemic phase due to the high level of vaccinations.”

Going further, Söder told the editors of the *Thüringische Landeszeitung* that he called for an end to mandatory mask wearing on trains, saying, “It is hard to understand why there is a requirement to wear masks on trains but not on planes. The obligation should [also] fall there.” Again, he justified this by claiming that Germany was on its way from the virus being a pandemic to endemic: “Right now, coronavirus is developing more like the flu.”

The claim that coronavirus is no worse than the flu has long been championed primarily by the far right. Now, representatives of all parties, the media and many so-called experts are spreading it.

A hearing on November 3 in the Schleswig-Holstein state parliament made this clear. The panel consisted of “scientific” proponents of a herd immunity policy who used their statements to downplay the virus and its consequences.

For example, virologist Jan Rupp told the hearing, “With children, we can’t really worry if they become positive or not,” and “It’s just a respiratory virus.” And paediatrician Ralf van Heek said, “Children don’t need protection from the infection. They need the infection. The problem is the protective measures.”

However, the virus has not become harmless, and the pandemic is by no means over. Just one look at the current numbers makes that clear.

Although the autumn school vacations have just ended in most of Germany’s states—meaning fewer contacts took place and there was even less testing than usual—the official infection figures remain at a high level. The 7-day incidence rate on Friday was 243.3 per

100,000 inhabitants, according to the Robert Koch Institute (RKI). Currently, between 400,000 and 1 million people in Germany are displaying symptoms of infection.

However, the official figures have long since ceased to be representative, as the testing infrastructure has been dismantled across the board and only positive PCR tests are included in the RKI statistics. The proportion of positive cases is currently over 40 percent, which indicates an extremely high number of unreported cases.

The situation also remains drastic in hospitals and nursing homes. Numerous new outbreaks occur every day. Last week, according to the RKI, there were 98 outbreaks in medical treatment facilities and 28 people died from previous outbreaks. In nursing homes, there were 312 outbreaks and 124 deaths.

The severity of the current situation is particularly evident in the continuing high number of those experiencing severe illness following infection. The adjusted hospitalization incidence rate is just under 12, which is equivalent to 10,000 hospitalizations per week; 1,219 people currently require intensive care. The 7-day average of daily coronavirus deaths was reported at 150 on Saturday. That means at least another 950 people succumbed to the virus in the past week alone.

An increase in the infection numbers, and thus also of those suffering more severe outcomes, is to be expected in the immediate future. Currently, the Omicron subvariants BQ.1 and BQ.1.1 are spreading. The two are characterized primarily by their high immune escape, i.e., the antibodies produced by vaccinations, previous infections, but also the effectiveness of drugs against a severe course of infection, have a weak to no effect.

Due to their high infectivity—they have a transmission advantage of more than 10 percent compared to previous variants—they have been nicknamed “Cerberus” (the twin-headed hellhound of Greek mythology). It is widely believed by experts that these variants will be responsible for the next major coronavirus wave in Europe before the end of November.

In France and the US, these variants are already dominating the pandemic. In Germany, the RKI states that both variants account for 4 percent each of

infection incidences. However, as these values are always communicated to the RKI with a delay of several weeks, and the proportion of both variants doubles approximately every week, it can be assumed they already account for a significantly higher proportion of infections in Germany.

Currently, there is not enough data available to make reliable statements about the severity of the course of illness with the new variants. However, the French newspaper *L'Indépendant* has reported that severe headaches and cardiac arrhythmias can occur after infection with these two variants.

In addition to the coronavirus wave, there is also the threat of a particularly aggressive flu wave in Germany this year. In recent years, it was largely absent due to the existing coronavirus protective measures. This year, however, with these measures largely abolished, the flu wave is starting earlier than usual and is having a more severe impact. For example, in its latest weekly report, the RKI warns, “In particular, the positive rate and the number of illnesses due to influenza show an increasing trend; in addition, RSV infections are leading to increased illness and hospitalization, especially in young children.”

Numerous scientists warn of a “twindemic” of COVID-19 and influenza. Dangerous double infections are also possible. Professor Dr. Stephan Ludwig, director at the Institute for Molecular Virology at the Westphalian Wilhelms University in Münster, warns, “Since coronaviruses and influenza viruses spread independently of each other, double infections can also occur, which are particularly dangerous.”



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