

Germany's federal and state governments end all remaining coronavirus protection measures

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Last Friday, Germany's last coronavirus protection measures by both state and federal governments ended with the dropping of the requirement to wear a mask for visitors in hospitals, nursing homes and doctors' surgeries. The Infection Protection Act expired and was not replaced by new legislation, for the first time since the pandemic began.

Federal Health Minister Karl Lauterbach (Social Democrat, SPD) took this as an opportunity to declare the pandemic over. "Considering the latest findings of the Coronavirus Expert Council and evaluation of the development of the disease burden by new variants, we can say that the pandemic is also over for Germany," he wrote on Twitter.

In various interviews and public statements, Lauterbach declared the handling of the pandemic a triumph: "We have successfully managed the pandemic in Germany and also with a good record," he claimed in Berlin on Wednesday. This statement is not only cynical, it shows the criminal character of the ruling class, which has literally walked over corpses in the pandemic, subordinating human life and the health of the population to ensure the profits of the banks and large corporations. The consequences have been dramatic.

Here are some facts and figures:

- Over 170,000 deaths in Germany have been reported during the pandemic, including 124 children and young people. An average of about 100 deaths per day are still being recorded.

- The actual death toll is even higher. According to the ifo Institute, excess mortality from 2020 to 2022 was 180,000, and according to a study by the World Health Organization (WHO), it was 195,000 in 2020

and 2021 alone. Life expectancy in Germany has fallen by 5.7 months.

- At least 1 million people are estimated to be suffering from Long COVID. The actual numbers are not recorded. The consequences can affect almost all organs, make people unable to work and last a lifetime.

- The unchecked spread of the virus has allowed new variants to evolve that are more infectious and resistant than the original form of the virus. The variant currently spreading, XBB.1.16, has the potential to undermine the immune defences of both the vaccinated and those who have recovered from a previous infection.

When Lauterbach celebrates all this as a "success," he does so as a culpable representative of German capitalism. While the pandemic has meant illness, death and massive social attacks for many workers and their families, it provided an orgy of enrichment for the ruling class. Thanks to the government's "Coronavirus Emergency Packages" at the beginning of the pandemic, and keeping the factories open, the big corporations, banks and super-rich were able to rake in record profits.

When Lauterbach criticizes past pandemic policies, he does so from the right. He again stated that the long school closures had not been necessary, a view now held by all bourgeois parties. The Left Party, for example, calls the closure of schools and nurseries "incomprehensible," and the Christian Democrats (CDU) rant about "devastating collateral damage."

Leading politicians from the government and the opposition are also calling for a "Commission of Enquiry" to evaluate the measures taken and to "examine their proportionality." It is obvious that such

a commission will not examine the measures scientifically but will criminalize them retroactively.

This is made clear, among other things, by the statements of the parliamentary director of the Liberal Democrats (FDP) parliamentary group, Christine Aschenberg-Dugnus. It was “important that the hurdles for infringements on fundamental rights are set higher in the future and are subject to parliamentary control,” she declared.

This is the narrative of the far right. Presenting protective measures as infringements on fundamental rights was one of the main arguments of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) and coronavirus deniers during the pandemic. The fact that members of the government are now adopting this argumentation word for word makes it clear that from the beginning, the ruling class would not take any protective measures at all in the event of another pandemic.

Yet the pandemic is far from “over.” The number of people in Germany infected with coronavirus is currently estimated by the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) to be between 300,000 and 500,000. However, since these numbers are based mainly on voluntary PCR testing, the number of unreported cases is likely to be much higher.

“The reporting of coronavirus is over. But coronavirus itself is not over,” pharmacologist Thorsten Lehr told the *Deutsche Presse Agentur*, adding that he believes the incidence rate per hundred thousand inhabitants was currently in the four-digit range. This would mean that more than 1 percent of the population was being infected every week.

The available data already show how dramatic the situation really is. Active outbreaks have been reported in 102 medical treatment facilities and in 25 nursing homes and homes for the elderly in recent weeks. Between 3,000 and 5,000 people are also hospitalized with COVID each week. The number of coronavirus patients requiring intensive care is 932, and nearly 100 people still die from the virus every day.

In addition, new mutations are spreading. The previously highly infectious Omicron BA sublineages, to which recent vaccines have been adapted, have now been displaced by Omicron XBB.1. The XBB sublineages, which now account for 72 percent of the infection cases, are characterized by their high immune resistance in addition to their high infectivity.

The XBB.1.16 variant, which is also known as “Arcturus,” is extremely alarming. This is characterized by three additional mutations (compared to the “Krakken” variant XBB.1.5) in the spike protein. The technical director for COVID-19 at the World Health Organization (WHO), Dr. Maria Van Kerkhove, already described it at the end of March as the most rapidly transmissible variant of the virus to date. In India, its spread is currently causing a massive increase in both infections and deaths.



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