

New coronavirus wave: “Frankenstein” variant spreading rapidly

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Largely ignored by governments and trade unions, a new SARS-CoV-2 variant is spreading at great speed: the “Stratus” or “Frankenstein” variant, XFG. It is causing high levels of sickness absence in nurseries, schools and care facilities and will further increase the number of long-COVID patients. Meanwhile, the government is pressing ahead unperturbed with its cuts to the healthcare system.

In a short time, the “Stratus” variant has become the dominant strain worldwide and is showing “substantial” growth across all WHO regions (Western Pacific, North and South America, Europe). In Germany, it already accounted for 84 percent of identified SARS-CoV-2 variants at the beginning of October 2025. The XFG variant is also dominant in Austria and Switzerland, where it makes up as much as 80 percent of viral load in wastewater.

The Robert Koch Institute (RKI) has reported a marked rise in acute respiratory illnesses since September, affecting all age groups. Apart from rhinoviruses, SARS-CoV-2 viruses were the second most frequently detected pathogen.

According to RKI data, the estimated COVID-19 incidence rate in the second week of October was around 600 infections per 100,000 inhabitants—up from about 400 the previous week. The true number of cases is far higher, since testing is now extremely limited and unsystematic.

The term “Frankenstein” variant is no exaggeration, but an accurate description of a genetic monster. XFG is a recombinant variant formed from the Omicron lineages LF.7 and LP.8.1.2—a genetic fusion of components from different virus types, creating a new, more resistant and “fitter” strain.

The number of long-COVID patients will undoubtedly continue to rise. By the end of 2024,

Germany had already registered more than 1.5 million people with long COVID or ME/CFS, with a blurred line between the two: the severe chronic multi-system illness ME/CFS, which also affects very young patients, is frequently the result of a COVID-19 infection. It often leads to complete and permanent incapacity for work, as the recovery rate is only about 5 percent per year.

But institutions such as the RKI and the government are downplaying the danger. There is a lack of systematic testing and studies on the clinical effects, and reporting on severe cases (for example, in intensive care units) has been “significantly reduced.” The system is deliberately flying blind.

The RKI and the Ministry of Health are advising senior citizens, vulnerable people and care workers to arrange vaccinations on their own initiative. Beyond the Standing Committee on Vaccination (STIKO)’s recommendation for risk groups, there are no emergency plans, protective measures or public addresses concerning the XFG wave. The governing coalition in Berlin is deliberately ignoring the spread and treating COVID-19 as a private illness, comparable to influenza, where everyone is responsible for themselves.

The Standing Conference of the State Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK) has decided to maintain compulsory classroom attendance in schools. Despite rising XFG numbers in autumn 2025, it is ruling out the reintroduction of nationwide masking or testing requirements. Health Minister Nina Warken (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) is stubbornly sticking to her plan to cut €1.8 billion from hospitals alone. The healthcare budget has been slashed from €64 billion (2022) to €20 billion (2025)—less than one-third of its previous level.

The trivialisation of the pandemic has long since become systematic, both across Europe and worldwide. The WHO currently classifies the risk, despite the alarming spread of XFG, as “low,” claiming there is “currently no evidence that this variant causes more severe illness or more deaths than other circulating variants.” This risk assessment is cynical, not least given that, according to WHO estimates, around 36 million people in Europe are suffering from long COVID.

The WHO has extended its International Health Regulations (IHR) Standing Recommendations for COVID-19 until April 2026, demonstrating that the ruling class does not regard the pandemic as over. This is the official acknowledgment of a “permanent state of infection.” As medical journalist Dr Christoph Specht put it, “The virus has come to stay.” He told ntv.de: “We will always have to deal with the virus.”

The WHO’s Technical Advisory Group on COVID-19 Vaccine Composition (TAG-CO-VAC) considers the current antigens (JN.1 or KP.2) still suitable and stresses that they remain effective in preventing symptomatic and severe illness. This focus on protection against severe disease alone shows the conscious decision to abandon any strategy of elimination.

As a result, “Frankenstein” can spread unchecked through nurseries, schools, care homes and public transport, and thus across society as a whole. Sickness absences will continue to rise. Rates are already persistently high: according to AOK health insurer data, there were 228 recorded sick leaves per 100 AOK members last year, and even higher figures are expected this year. The main causes are respiratory illnesses, responsible for more than one in three absences.

It is being consciously accepted that elderly and vulnerable people will fall seriously ill, and that care homes, hospitals, nurseries and schools will be pushed to their limits or even collapse. Workers in public transport, childcare, teaching and nursing are expected to shoulder and make up for all absences despite low pay, while their parents, grandparents and vulnerable relatives fall ill and become care-dependent—at a time when care places are ever fewer and ever more expensive.

The dire consequences of COVID for the working

class are the result of a deliberate policy pursued by all political authorities since the start of the pandemic. While serious scientists issued warnings, capitalist governments knowingly allowed the mass infection of society because a shutdown of production would have endangered the profits of major corporations.

“Profits before lives” has been the guiding principle ever since. On this basis, the SARS-CoV-2 virus was allowed to circulate freely, producing new, immune-evasive and “fitter” lineages—such as the current XFG variant—that spread even more easily.

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and the *World Socialist Web Site* warned early of the pandemic and consistently advocated a global elimination strategy. In April 2021, the ICFI responded to the uncontrolled spread of the coronavirus by founding the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

In the founding statement of the IWA-RFC, issued on May Day 2021 as a call for a “global counter-offensive of the working class,” it declared:

The pandemic is a world historical event that will reverberate for decades to come ... The pandemic will continue until there is a conscious and independent intervention of the working class to remove control of the management and direction of the response to the virus from the capitalist ruling elites and into its own hands...

[The International Workers Alliance] will be a means through which workers throughout the world can share information and organize a united struggle to demand protection for workers, the shutdown of unsafe facilities and nonessential production, and other emergency measures that are necessary to stop the spread of the virus.



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