

Omicron wave in Germany leads to massive increase in infections

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The surge in cases in Germany shows that the Omicron wave of infections has now arrived in Germany. From 45,690 infections on Tuesday, the number almost doubled to 80,430 on Wednesday—the highest figure in the pandemic so far. On Friday, another grim record was set with 92,223 new infections.

The seven-day incidence rate has also more than doubled since the beginning of the year. While it was 207 per 100,000 inhabitants at the beginning of the year, it shot up to 427 in less than two weeks. In Bremen it is already 1,427 and in Berlin 950.

However, the official figures are far below the actual number of infections. At the end of last year, Health Minister Karl Lauterbach (Social Democratic Party, SPD) stated that the actual numbers were two to three times higher than the recorded figures. Currently, the percentage of positive-tested persons is about 23 percent, which indicates a massive number of unreported cases.

Testing laboratories are also reaching their limits. Michael Müller, chairman of the Association of Accredited Laboratories in Medicine, told the *Rheinische Post* on Thursday, “The high infection figures are accompanied by many tests being carried out. Because PCR tests are currently given hardly any prioritisation, laboratories in Germany are increasingly reaching their capacity limits.” This was especially critical for sick people and hospitals.

Instead of reacting to this by expanding testing capacities, the federal government plans to further restrict and prioritise tests. The head of the German government’s Coronavirus Crisis Staff, Major General Carsten Breuer, told the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* on Thursday, “We will certainly have to pool capacities where necessary, as with all scarce resources. That also applies to tests.”

The current wave of coronavirus infections across Europe is being accelerated by the highly contagious Omicron variant, which already accounts for 73 percent of infections in Germany, and even 96 percent in Bremen. However, due to the time delay in sequencing and the rapid spread of Omicron, the actual proportion is significantly higher.

The rise in infections is so rapid that WHO Director for Europe Dr. Hans Kluge warned on Tuesday “more than 50 percent of the region’s population will be infected with Omicron in the next six to eight weeks.” That would cause a massive flood of new cases for the already overburdened hospitals across Europe and drive up the death toll even faster.

In France, where almost three-quarters of the population have already received two vaccinations, 23,371 of the 3.4 million active cases are hospitalised and 3,969 require life support. Extrapolated across Europe, this would mean almost 3 million people in hospitals in the next two months, half a million of whom would need life-sustaining measures.

In Germany, too, the number of hospitalised and dead is rising. In the last three days alone, a total of 3,000 people have been hospitalised and 1,000 have died. The number of those requiring intensive care stands at 3,050, while regional capacity bottlenecks continue to arise.

As the statements by the WHO and the numbers in France and worldwide make clear, hospitals are in danger of collapsing under a deluge of hospitalisations unless far-reaching lockdown measures are not adopted and implemented immediately. This is vehemently opposed by capitalist governments of all stripes.

In Germany, the “traffic light” coalition of SPD, Liberal Democrats (FDP) and Greens continues unwaveringly with the “profits before lives” policy, which has already led to more than 115,000 deaths. This was underlined by Lauterbach’s speech in the Bundestag (federal parliament) on Thursday and his joint press appearance with Lothar Wieler, head of the Robert Koch Institute (RKI), and Charité virologist Christian Drosten on Friday.

Although Lauterbach referred at both to the high number of victims and warned of the emergence of even more infectious variants, he made no announcements about effective measures to combat the pandemic. Essentially, his appearances consisted of the cynical assertion that Germany had “come through the pandemic better than other European countries” and the appeal to get vaccinated.

Vaccination is an important tool to fight the pandemic and can achieve significant success as part of a strategy to eradicate the virus. However, without all the other necessary public health measures—lockdowns, mass testing and contact tracing—it cannot have a significant impact in containing the pandemic. This has been further confirmed by the Omicron variant.

A strategy relying solely on vaccination conjures up the possibility of new, even more infectious variants emerging. Omicron already requires a third booster vaccination, and an adjustment of the vaccines are necessary. Once the virus has free rein, it is only a matter of time before another variant completely undermines vaccine protection.

Lauterbach's claim that COVID-19 could become "an endemic virus with low mortality rates" essentially conforms with the strategy of "herd immunity," which was openly advocated by the extreme right at the beginning of the pandemic. Meanwhile, it is being implemented by all governments in Europe—whether nominally left or right.

The Omicron variant demonstrates that the virus does not mutate in the direction of "milder" forms but, on the contrary, becomes even more infectious and resistant to vaccines from mutation to mutation. Given such widespread infectivity, a slightly lower mortality rate of the virus strain does not have a "mild" effect.

Lauterbach, Drosten and Wieler declared on Friday that it was premature to "let the virus run [free]" (Drosten), but in reality, the deliberate infection of the population has long been taking place. In total, almost 8 million people in Germany have been infected—about 3 million of them in the past two months since the traffic light coalition took over the reins of government.

The first measure taken by the new government parties was to end the designation of a "national epidemic emergency" and thus the legal basis for nationwide lockdowns. Lauterbach also voted for the repeal of this regulation and has since repeatedly spoken out against the closure of schools and businesses. The latest shortening of the quarantine period aims to maintain the flow of profits even under conditions of mass infection.

The Bundestag debate on Thursday and Friday once again clearly demonstrated that the traffic light coalition will walk over corpses to defend the interests of big business. Finance Minister Christian Lindner (FDP) declared that the government was working to "return to the constitutionally mandated debt ceiling." The goal was "to reduce the German debt ratio." In other words, the government is preparing fierce social attacks.

At the same time, the military is to be massively upgraded. "We must continue to increase defence spending. We need this money to provide our troops with the necessary

equipment," said Social Democratic Defence Minister Christine Lambrecht. "Helicopters that don't fly and guns that miss their target" had been "ridiculed for a long time." She wanted to "modernise procurement as much as possible."

Resistance is growing around the world to the aggressive policies of social attacks and militarism and the refusal of governments to take the necessary measures to protect the health and lives of their populations.

In the US, to protect their health and that of their families, tens of thousands of teachers and students are refusing to return to face-to-face classes. In France, a nationwide teachers' strike paralysed the school system on Thursday. In Greece, students occupied more than 250 schools to express their demand for safety in the pandemic. In Germany, the protest of the student Yasmin from Hagen against unsafe face-to-face teaching shows the growing opposition to the pandemic policy.

In the fight against the pandemic, the trade unions stand on the other side of the barricades. In Germany, the GEW education union vehemently supports face-to-face teaching and even the new quarantine guidelines. According to the GEW, teachers should teach classes even when they are in quarantine.

"Resistance to mass infection cannot be organised through these rotten organisations," says the latest call from the Network of Action Committees for Safe Education. "For a broader struggle against unsafe schools, this independent, internationalist movement must be extended to the whole working class. It must focus on saving lives, not securing profits."

There will be an emergency meeting of the Network on January 18 at 7:00 p.m. to organise and push forward resistance to the policy of deliberate mass infection on this basis. Register for the meeting and inform your friends and colleagues.



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