

Autumn COVID wave develops in Germany

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An autumn coronavirus wave has been developing in Germany for several weeks, as is shown by all indicators. The German government's infection radar, which analyses the viral load in wastewater based on data from over 100 sewage treatment plants, shows that the incidence of infection had only fallen minimally compared to the summer wave. In recent weeks, the numbers have risen again significantly.

At the peak of the summer wave in July, the viral load was 118,000 gene copies per litre of wastewater. At the beginning of August, it fell to 103,000 and is currently at 163,000 gene copies. Overall, the viral load was therefore more than twice as high throughout the summer as the previous year.

According to estimates by GrippeWeb, a portal of the Robert Koch Institute public health body, the current COVID-19 incidence rate in the population is around 1,400 per 100,000 inhabitants. This means that 1.4 percent of the German population is infected with the virus every week. The increase is steep. The previous week the incidence was 1,200, at the beginning of August it was 600.

In Bavaria, wastewater monitoring shows an even more significant increase. In Munich, for example, the viral load in wastewater has more than doubled compared to the previous week and is thus higher than it has been since the beginning of the year. The Oktoberfest, which, with its 6.7 million visitors, served as a two-week-long superspreader event, bears central responsibility for this. In Rhineland-Palatinate, the State Investigation Office reported a 78 percent increase in the number of cases compared to the previous week.

Various other indicators from the federal government's infection radar also show a sharp rise in the number of infections. For example, the number of visits to the doctor due to acute respiratory illnesses with COVID-19 is two to three times higher than in the

summer, at 89 per 100,000 inhabitants per week.

The number of hospitalisations due to severe respiratory illness with COVID-19 stands at a seven-day incidence of 2.2, which is three times higher than at the beginning of July. The number of deaths, which currently stands at 80 per week, has also tripled compared to the beginning of July.

Virologist and specialist in microbiology and infection epidemiology Timo Ulrichs told *Focus Online*: "An autumn wave could well be imminent, and the new fitness of the sub-variant KP.3.1.1 could also contribute to this."

KP.3.1.1, a successor to the JN.1 lineage, is already dominant in several countries and does, indeed, play a central role in the current autumn wave in Germany.

A new study by Japanese scientists published in the medical journal *The Lancet* states: "KP.3.1.1 has a significantly higher reproduction number than its predecessors KP.2, KP.2.3 and KP.3." The predecessor variants KP.2 and KP.3 had already led to an increase in infections in the summer months, although the weather conditions are less favourable for the spread of the disease in summer than in winter.

In Germany, KP.3.1.1 currently accounts for 43 percent of infections and is therefore predominant. At the same time, the recombinant subline XEC has a share of 28 percent—and the trend is rising. XEC was first discovered in Germany in June and has spread from there to 27 countries. Virologists estimate that it has around twice the growth advantage of KP.3.1.1 and will be the dominant variant in winter.

Above all, the emergence of new variants disproves the lie that the pandemic is over. In fact, the pandemic is not over, and it is only a matter of time before an even deadlier variant emerges. Contrary to the claims made by politicians and the media, COVID-19 is therefore in no way comparable to influenza.

The State Statistical Office of Baden-Württemberg

recently published figures investigating precisely this. It concluded that a total of 186 people died from influenza in Baden-Württemberg in 2023. At the same time, 3,343 deaths from coronavirus were recorded, i.e. almost 18 times as many. And this in the year in which all protective measures were ended with the argument that the pandemic was over.

In the summer months, the difference in the number of deaths was even more pronounced. While five people died of the flu in Baden-Württemberg from June to August 2023, there were 128 coronavirus deaths, 25 times as many.

Currently, around 12 percent of all people who have to be treated in hospital for a respiratory illness are there because of a coronavirus infection.

The director of virology at the Technical University of Munich, Ulrike Protzer, said: “Coronavirus is not a cold, and it won’t become one. Just like RSV and influenza, the virus penetrates particularly deep into the lungs, attacks the respiratory tract more strongly and can also affect other organs in the body.”

Unlike RSV and influenza, coronavirus also carries a high risk of long-term effects that can impact almost any organ and can also have a devastating impact on basic abilities such as moving, seeing or working. The probability of acquiring Long COVID is around 10 percent with the first infection and increases with each subsequent infection.

Exposing the population to the coronavirus forever and allowing the people to be infected again and again can therefore only mean degrading and destroying the health and lives of millions of people in the long term.



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