

# Germany: Schools and child daycare centres open despite the high risk of infection

By Marianne Arens  
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Most schools and child daycare centres in Germany will resume normal operations in the course of this month. Existing distancing rules, wearing of masks, tests and corona protective measures will no longer apply. Full school openings in all of Germany's federal states are due to resume without restrictions after the summer holidays at the latest.

This unacknowledged policy of “herd immunity” at the expense of children, education assistants and teachers is playing with fire. According to the Robert Koch Institute (RKI), over 2,500 employees in daycare centres and schools had been infected with COVID-19 by June 9, and seven died—despite the fact that schools were closed shortly after the pandemic broke out. Now the question is posed: what will happen when all schools reopen without any restrictions!

The Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site* call upon teachers to establish action committees that operate independently of the trade unions in order to protect themselves and their pupils. Similar initiatives have been launched in the UK, Australia and the United States.

School and child daycare workers cannot place any confidence in the German public service workers union, Verdi, or the GEW teacher's trade union. It is no accident that these unions have been silent during the pandemic. The explanation rests with the parties they support—the SPD, the Greens and the Left Party are ruthlessly enforcing the opening up of schools in those states where they hold power.

The prime mover is the state of Thuringia headed by premier Bodo Ramelow (Left Party). From June 15, kindergartens and schools are to open in the state on a daily basis for all children. All existing contact restrictions no longer apply and are replaced by “recommendations.” A recent report from Thuringia notes that a child daycare teacher in Steinbach-Hallenberg has just been tested positive for COVID-19; nine colleagues and eleven children have been identified as contact persons.

In Thuringia and the CDU-ruled state of Saxony, cinemas, indoor swimming pools, gyms and saunas have been reopened along with schools and daycare centres. This is despite the fact that the coronavirus spreads widely through the air leading to a high risk of infection in closed, shared rooms.

Even teachers and care workers categorised as belonging to high-risk groups are increasingly being brought back to work despite contact with increasing numbers of children—although the respected RKI institute continues to classify the risk of infection

for children as “very high.”

“What is happening here is a human experiment,” commented one Twitter user named “Paro” on June 8. “In fact, it's a criminal procedure. Because school is not voluntary! Students (+ parents + teachers) are being forced to participate in this experiment! Although the dangers to health / life are well known.”

The Social Democrat-Left Party-Green coalition administration in the city-state of Berlin resumed school openings on May 11 and has gradually expanded school attendance. Normal schooling is planned after the summer vacation, i.e., from August 10.

Five coronavirus infections have already been detected on June 8 at a primary school in Berlin-Spandau. Sixteen people were then tested positive the next day. Fifty children and nine teachers have been quarantined, but face-to-face classes are expected to continue. In the meantime, the Berlin district of Neukölln has reported two primary school children with the virus and shortly afterwards nine infected persons.

In addition, due to a lack of medical personnel, thousands of small children attending school for the first time in Berlin will not receive the usual mandatory medical check-up before schools open up in August.

Four out of five teachers are teaching without the most elementary COVID-19 protection, according to a nationwide survey by the education association VBE. Its director Udo Beckmann commented: “Instead of creating an appropriate work environment with enough time for education and training, teachers are being given a bucket to do the cleaning.”

From a thousand teachers surveyed, 29 percent reported that their school had little or no cleaning agents, gloves and disinfectants, and that they had to assist with cleaning. Sixty percent said that the burden is now higher compared to regular school operation.

The treatment of teaching staff in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) is particularly cynical. Here, the state government sent kits to 10,000 facilities at the start of daycare centre opening on June 8. Teachers are expected to assemble the masks themselves. Teachers' comments on the measure on the internet included “incredible,” “disrespectful,” and “really shameful.”

Many teachers tweeted they have “a bad feeling” when they contemplate the complete opening of schools. But “I don't think anyone cares,” said one of those affected. “It's just a matter of getting as many parents back to work as possible. Money is the

reason why everything should work as it did at the start of the year. Fuck the teachers and education staff.”

Another replies: “Donald-the elephant-Trump trumpets on Twitter: NASDAQ alltime high! And so is it. It doesn’t matter whether a few hundred thousand more people are killed. The main thing is that the economy is up and running.”

Many point out that “parents and children were neither listened to or asked about the schools.” One devoted teacher writes she gets “headache, panic and feels the need to hit her head against the wall.”

New infections are being recorded almost on a daily basis and alarming reports are piling up especially in NRW. A complete day care group (16 children and four teachers) were sent into quarantine June 8 in the city of Bochum after a corona case had been confirmed.

In Wattenscheid, two students also tested positive for COVID-19. A study group consisting of eight students is also in quarantine, but school operations continue. In Ahlen (Münsterland), a primary school child who could have infected an entire school group was reported ill on June 9.

In Hesse, which is governed by a coalition of the Greens and the CDU, the state government wants to send all students back to school before the holidays. The plan is to “check how infection numbers develop in the six weeks of vacation,” said the Hessian Minister of Culture Alexander Lorz (CDU). Regarding the proposal by the virologist Hendrik Streeck to specifically allow more infections, Lorz told the Frankfurter Rundschau: “I find the idea very exciting and am currently thinking about it.”

Very many politicians are putting pressure on teachers and educators to forego distancing restrictions and masks. This was also expressly requested on Tuesday by the chairperson of the Conference of Education Ministers (KMK), Stefanie Hubig (SPD), a lawyer and former head of department in the Justice Ministry headed by Heiko Maas.

In an interview for Radio-Berlin Brandenburg, Hubig emphasised that it is now “important to depart from the distancing rule so we can teach in normal class groups again.” This is what “experts” had advised her to do. She also ruled out “unnecessary, across the board tests, so to speak,” and masks were only an option for older adolescents.

The KMK chair based her proposals on purely economic arguments. The distancing rule means “we can actually only send half a class, sometimes only a third of a class at a time to school while having a teacher to teach them. Then of course rooms and people become scarce.”

Numerous coronavirus cases have occurred at schools in Rhineland-Palatinate, the state in which Stefanie Hubig currently heads the Education Ministry. By June 9 suspected cases of infection were registered at a total of 21 schools. There are currently 11 confirmed COVID-19 cases in eight schools in Trier; many others have been registered in Ludwigshafen and in the region of Rhein-Pfalz.

The same politicians who pump hundreds of billions of euros of so-called “Corona aid” into the vaults of the big banks and leading companies see no need to equip schools with the measures needed to combat the coronavirus, a massive increase in teaching staff and

investing in better, healthier schools to protect teachers, educators and children.

All of the propaganda that children are basically immune to the virus has long been refuted by scientific studies. The Charité virologist Christian Drosten, who has been vilely slandered by the *Bild* tabloid and other right-wing agitators, stands by the results of his research: children carry an equally high viral load as adults and are therefore both contagious and endangered. The researchers concluded for schools and daycare centres: “The unrestricted opening of these facilities should be carefully monitored with the help of preventive diagnostic tests.”

This, however, is what is particularly lacking. The VBE survey mentioned earlier in this article notes that 74 percent of respondents said they would welcome voluntary tests. Very often, those with cold symptoms are not even tested. Only one in three teachers confirmed that persons with a fever and coughing symptoms in their facility were actually tested for the coronavirus, while 40 percent said methods of treatment varied depending upon the attending physician. This bears no relation to the proposals made by WHO and Drosten for non-symptomatic, comprehensive and regularly repeated tests.

This means that a new wave of the corona pandemic is practically inevitable. In Israel, school openings led to a new flare-up of the virus in just three weeks. In a short period of time over 300 new COVID-19 cases were recorded. The Israeli government responded by closing all schools.

In Germany, kindergarten teachers, teaching staff and pupils are undergoing a crucial experience. This cannot be separated from the global protests following the police murder of George Floyd. They are learning first-hand that all politicians—including those from the SPD, the Greens and the Left Party—are more committed to the profit system than to people’s lives. Like thousands of workers in the auto industry, at Amazon or in the meat industry, teachers and educators are being forced into “normal operations,” which were anything but normal even before the corona pandemic.

As far as schools are concerned, the KMK chairwoman Stefanie Hubig also recommended that the shortage of teachers be compensated by substitute teachers and those with no training as teachers. This makes clear that German politicians are determined to return to the status quo, characterised by overly large classes, neglected schools and a shortage of teachers. These conditions have led to massive social inequality. The pandemic is now turning the already existing crisis into a catastrophe.

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