

COVID-19 deaths surpass 76,000 in Europe as Spanish government sends millions back to work

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More than 76,600 people have died from COVID-19 in Europe, according to official figures, with a further 3,021 reported dead yesterday.

Britain is the latest country to record over 10,000 deaths of COVID-19 after France, Spain, Italy and the United States. A further 737 people were announced dead from COVID-19 Sunday, taking the overall toll to 10,612. New infections in Britain rose by 5,288 to 84,279.

There remain over 70,000 confirmed active cases of coronavirus, with over 1,500 people classed as “serious, critical.” According to modelling advice to the Conservative government, the peak of the outbreak is expected to be reached over the next two weeks.

Sunday saw Prime Minister Boris Johnson discharged from hospital after being admitted a week previously. It emerged that Johnson, who had to spend three nights in intensive care, was close to death at one stage.

Yesterday Professor John Ashton, a former regional director of Public Health England and former president of the Faculty of Public Health, accused the government of distorting the death figures in their attempts to conceal the real numbers. Ashton told *Sky News*, “At the moment, a lot of what's going on in these [government daily] briefings is coming very close to lies and we must prevent this from happening at all costs.”

He added, “It may be one and a half times what we've got... it may even be twice as many... you know if I was to say well if it's 10, let's call it 20... is my truth any better than their truth in this?”

The government is taking the same indifferent attitude to the numbers of National Health Service (NHS) workers who are dying. On Sunday, as four more NHS workers were reported dead—in the hours since UK Health Secretary Mike Hancock announced the previous day that there had already been 19 deaths—he declined to give a

figure on NHS employees' deaths.

It is estimated that at least 41 health and social care workers have died, with the latest Donna Campbell, who worked at Velindre Cancer Centre in Cardiff, perishing at the University Hospital Wales.

At one major Welsh hospital, the Royal Gwent Hospital in Newport, about half of Accident and Emergency consultants and nurses have contracted coronavirus and are off work.

The number of NHS staff falling victim to COVID-19 is extraordinary and can only be explained as the result of inadequate and even non-existent provision of personal protective equipment (PPE). Another worker who died, Abdul Mabud Chowdhury, a consultant urologist at Homerton hospital in Hackney East London, wrote a Facebook message to Johnson last month insisting on the immediate issuing of PPE for frontline staff and fast-tracking of COVID-19 testing for health care workers. Each of the three nurses, recently photographed wearing bin bags as makeshift PPE, have all since been infected with COVID-19.

Hancock provoked public outrage when, referring to health workers, he said Friday, “We need everyone to treat PPE like the precious resource it is... Everyone should use the equipment they clinically need, in line with the guidelines: no more and no less.” Blaming the wider population, he declared that staying at home was the main way to avoid infection. “A front door is better than any face mask.”

Asked his thoughts on Hancock's PPE statements, Professor Ashton replied: “The idea that personal protection is a special resource is beyond unacceptable. You have to give workmen and women the tools with which to do their job... and their job of work in the front line of this highly-contagious virus that can be fatal to

health workers, as to anybody else, means they must have proper protection and you know, that's not just a flimsy pinny [apron], it's actually proper equipment to be able to wear and to discard. Let's be 21st century about this, not Dickensian please.”

He said of Johnson's discharge from hospital: “[T]he amount of attention this is now getting, particularly since he's on the mend compared to the double figures or more of health workers who've died or are very sick, I find really shocking in itself, because the NHS workers are putting themselves on the line for us...I think we should be hearing a lot more about the health workers who are being put in harm's way by the lack of personal protection.”

NHS staff are being infected and are dying because of government policies. It emerged Sunday that the stockpile of PPE protective equipment for healthcare workers—to be used in the event of a pandemic—fell in value by almost 40 percent over the past six years. Under the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition and then under Theresa May's Tory government the stockpile's value was cut from £831 million in 2013 to £506 million by March last year.

More than 715,000 people have signed a petition calling on the government to provide PPE “for ALL frontline NHS staff.”

Governments throughout Europe have spent the last weeks, as the death rates mounted, conspiring to get the population back to work. The first mass return to work directive has been issued in Spain, with around four million workers going back today. Many hundreds are still dying every day in a country that has the highest rate of deaths—(366) per one million of the population—on the planet. A further 510 died Saturday and 619 on Sunday, taking Spain's total over 17,000—the third highest in the world behind Italy and the US.

Entire sections of the economy are being flung open, with industrial and construction workers having restrictions on working lifted. Service-based companies, including those selling hygiene products, press and stationery will be allowed to trade. Other businesses permitted to open are petrol stations, tech equipment suppliers, tobacconists, pet food shops, ecommerce operations, dry cleaners. Hairdressers are being permitted to go to people's homes.

Workers are being sent back to work under conditions that can only spread the virus, leading to more deaths, and the Spanish Socialist Party and pseudo-left Podemos coalition government could not care less. It has formulated a “guide of good practices in the workplace”

with several recommendations that are nonsensical. For example, workers are advised to avoid crowding in public transport. Under the guidelines, workers can get infected at work as long as when they return home, they remember to disinfect mobile phone and glasses and leave their shoes at the front door!

In Italy, another 431 people died taking the tally to almost 20,000 (19,899). Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte has signed a decree extending the lockdown until May 3. Conte has named Vittorio Colao, former chief executive officer of Vodafone Group Plc, to head a task force that will help map out an exit from the lockdown and enforce a return to work. The country “can't wait for the virus to disappear completely” before restarting the economy, Conte said.

The decree allows the April 14 opening of stationery stores, bookshops, and children's clothing stores and includes the forestry and wood industry among the permitted production activities. The back to work plan is being rolled out even as the country is bracing for thousands more deaths. More than 350 field hospitals have been constructed and more are being built to cope with the tsunami of intensive care patients. Milan opened an intensive care field hospital Tuesday at the city fairgrounds for 200 patients, complete with a pharmacy and radiology wards. It expects to eventually employ 900 staff. At least another two are being completed in Rome.

In France, 561 more deaths were announced, taking fatalities to 14,393. The number of hospital patients requiring intensive care stands at 6,845. In Germany, 125 deaths were announced, bringing the total to just short of 3,000 (2,996).

The official death tolls reported daily by European governments are now widely discredited as virtually none report the number of deaths occurring outside hospital—at home or in residential care homes. Every day, horror stories emerge across the continent of hundreds who have died without ever being offered emergency hospital treatment or being denied treatment as they were not deemed a “priority.”

France recently began publishing COVID-19 deaths in nursing homes, with 246 reported dead on Sunday.



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