UK: Virus infection rate increases as Johnson government continues ending lockdown

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Boris Johnson's government is pressing ahead with its homicidal plan to send millions of workers back to work, and school children back to school, ignoring mounting evidence that the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic is still infecting masses of people.

Last Monday, the government began the phased reopening of nurseries and primary schools and has instructed secondary schools to open on June 15.

By Friday, Public Health England reported that the critical "R" (reproduction) rate of the virus was at 1 or above in two of England's nine regions. The regional breakdown was calculated in conjunction with Cambridge University's MRC Biostatistics Unit.

In the north-west of England, R stands at 1.01. In the south-west it is at 1. If the R rate is at 1 or above, a virus will continue to spread through a population, while a value less than 1 indicates the virus is in decline.

The north-west region has a population of over 7 million people and contains the cities of Manchester and Liverpool. The south-west has a population of 5.6 million, and includes its eight cities: Salisbury, Bath, Wells, Bristol, Gloucester, Exeter, Plymouth, Truro and large towns including Plymouth, Swindon, Gloucester, Cheltenham, Exeter, Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch.

Just as significant as the R value reaching the tipping point in two regions is the fact that the R value has risen to between 0.7 and 1 *throughout England*. In London, the capital and most populated area of the UK, the R value is almost at 1 (0.95). In the south-east of England as a whole—in which London is located—the R value was also recorded at almost 1 (0.97). All other regions are almost at 1, including East of England (0.94), Midlands (0.9) and North-east and Yorkshire (0.89).

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) data on the "R" value is out of date as soon as it is published due to the surveying required. The latest data only covers the last two weeks in May—ending on May 29. This will not take into account the movement of the R value since then, with many nursery and primary schools opened last week and increasing number of retail outlets allowed to open. From June 15, all non-essential shops will be allowed to open.

Since imposing a lockdown on March 23, Johnson and government ministers—along with Chief Medical Officer Sir Chris Whitty and Chief Scientific Adviser Sir Patrick Vallance—have proclaimed keeping the R rate below 1 as the precondition for ending the lockdown. Instead, ending the lockdown continues.

Monday saw the government proclaim that the R rate was below 1 in every region and in decline—based on test figures that massively underestimate the infection rate and figures for the weekend that are always low due to a lack of reporting.

Nothing the government is doing in abandoning the lockdown has any scientific basis. Generally, the Tories are citing a fall in the number of deaths and infections since their high point in April. But the dip is the product of the lockdown, which is estimated to have cut infections by over 80 percent, and that is now being abandoned.

The PHE/Cambridge team said there was "some evidence" that the R value "has risen in all regions" of England. The rise was "probably due to increasing mobility and mixing between households and in public and workplace settings," after lockdown measures were eased.

Even after the high point of fatalities in April, hundreds of people have continued to die every day

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from COVID-19. In the first seven days of this month, another 1,608 people died. On June 2, there were 324 deaths; on June 3, 359; and on June 5, 357.

The UK has passed 40,000 COVID-19 deaths according to the government's own manipulated figures. These deaths equate to almost 10 percent of all 407,000+ deaths officially recorded worldwide, despite the UK's 67 million population making up just 0.87 percent of the global population.

Even this terrible toll is not the true picture. According to a new study based on ONS data by health care business consultancy LaingBuisson, by the end of June excess deaths from coronavirus are "likely to approach 59,000 across the entire English population, of which about 34,000 (57%) will have been care home residents." These figures exclude deaths in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Fatalities are likely much higher already. Modelling last week by the *Times* estimated that, up to June 2, there were 66,400 deaths.

According to the BBC, at least 12 members of the government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) have spoken out against relaxing the lockdown under conditions in which the R value is rising. Other scientists have opposed the government's moves to prematurely end the lockdown, with some raising that the government was also too late in putting the lockdown.

But statements that raise widespread concern among workers are met with supreme indifference by the Tories.

Scientists have challenged the government's daily figures regarding the number of new infections, generally reported in the low thousands. On Monday, the figure was recorded as 1,205, but the ONS Infection Survey suggested there were around 6,000 new infections just in England each day. Other estimates put the figure at around 8,000 a day.

Professor John Edmunds of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and a SAGE member told the BBC's *Andrew Marr Show* Sunday, "I wish we had gone into lockdown earlier. That has cost a lot of lives."

Edmunds warned that the pandemic was now concentrated in "harder to control" areas such as hospitals and care homes, and these areas had to be addressed in any strategy. The pandemic was "definitely not over," he said. "There's an awful long way to go. And if we relax, then this epidemic will come back very fast."

The government is to reopen most of the economy this month in the firm knowledge that the infection rate will rise and many more people will die. The *Times* reported yesterday, "According to Sage papers, the government was advised last month that it is 'likely' that R will rise above 1 should non-essential businesses reopen."

There could be no clearer demonstration that the government is imposing its herd immunity policy, which envisages a mass infection of tens of millions of people and mass deaths.

Despite knowing the terrible consequences of sending people back to work and children to school in the middle of a pandemic, the Labour Party and trade unions are collaborating fully in these crimes.

Commenting on the new R values, Labour's mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, stated only that it was "very worrying." He told the *Manchester Evening News*, "It appears, I would say, that lockdown has been relaxed too early, given the fact that 'track, test and trace' is some way from being up and running,"

"I think it begs the question as to whether the advice is right to people in the North West," he added. Yet like the rest of the Labour Party, Burnham proposed nothing by way of opposing the government's plans.

No amount of pressure from scientists, certainly not the polite complaints of the Labourites, will even slow down the back-to-work drive. Opposition must be built in the working class, acting independently of the trade unions working openly with Johnson, and making their own appeal to scientists and public health experts for advice.

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