

Lancet warns of massive resurgence of coronavirus after UK school reopening

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A modelling study published in the *Lancet*, “Child And Adolescent Health,” warns that the UK’s testing and tracing for coronavirus is inadequate to prevent a “rebound” of the epidemic once schools are reopened next month.

One author, Chris Bonell, professor of public health sociology at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, warns, “Reopening schools fully in September, alongside reopening workplaces in society, without an effective test, trace, isolating (TTI) strategy could result in a second wave of infections *between two and 2.3 times* the size of the original wave [emphasis added].”

The study modelled an “optimistic” scenario, assuming 68 percent of contacts of people testing positive could be traced, in which “an epidemic rebound might be prevented.” However, the current level of coverage is closer to the study’s “worst case” scenario, which assumed only 40 percent were traced. Bonell explains, “Looking at the NHS reports from the TTI system, it looks like it’s about 50 percent coverage.”

Without an improvement, the government is “likely to induce a second wave that would peak in December 2020 if schools open full-time in September.”

This warning comes as a resurgence of the virus is already underway. According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), 4,200 people are being infected with coronavirus every day, up from 3,200 the week before and 2,500 the week before that.

But the government’s response to the *Lancet* study has made clear its determination to reopen the economy in the interests of big business, whatever the cost to the population. Simon Clarke, minister for local government, told *Sky News*: “One thing is clear, schools are going to reopen in full in the autumn, that is not up for debate.” He described the NHS Test and Trace System as a “massive success.”

On Saturday, the government’s modelling expert

Professor Graham Medley suggested pubs and restaurants may have to be closed as a “trade-off” to allow schools to reopen. He said, “closing some of the other networks, some of the other activities may well be required to enable us to open schools. It might come down to a question of which do you trade off against each other and then that’s a matter of prioritising, do we think pubs are more important than schools?”

Even this entirely misguided “trade off” was rejected. The *Guardian* reported, “English pubs are likely to be spare any new restrictions” after Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s spokesman played down Medley’s suggestion, adding “we are committed to supporting the hospitality industry, which has had a very tough time.”

Last week, Johnson met with Chancellor Rishi Sunak to discuss ways of avoiding a second UK lockdown in the event of a resurgence of the virus later this year. Their overwhelming concern is to maintain the flow of corporate profits. This precludes any serious public health measures, leaving only piecemeal interventions which cause serious distress to working-class households while doing nothing to substantially address the threat of the virus.

These sociopathic priorities led to the absurd situation last week when several million people in the north-west of England and Leicester were placed under additional public health restrictions at less than an hour’s notice, and mandatory mask wearing was extended, just one day before more than two million medically vulnerable people were told to stop shielding and return to work if ordered to.

As millions of people were prevented from visiting the gardens of their relatives, they were encouraged, along with the rest of the nation, to “Eat Out to Help Out” in pubs and restaurants. The slogan refers to a government scheme subsidising 50 percent of the cost of food and participating cafes and restaurants, up to £10 per head, for

three days a week. Several pubs across the country have already been responsible for clusters of COVID-19 cases.

Britons also continue to be encouraged to travel for their holidays—yesterday EasyJet reported it was increasing its number of flights above expectations to cope with increased demand—even as countries like Spain and Luxemburg are suddenly removed from quarantine exemptions, Greek flights are cancelled, and French and German authorities warn of a second wave.

The new laws on wearing masks, which will not be properly enforced, follow months in which the government cast doubt on their effectiveness. According to a survey of 70,000 people by University College London, just 45 percent of adults in England feel they understand current government guidelines, compared to 90 percent in March, during the period of stricter lockdown. The danger is that this confusion, combined with the government and media's relentless boosterism and lying complacency, will dull popular consciousness of the danger posed by the pandemic—facilitating the spread of the disease.

Dr Bharat Pankhania, senior consultant in Communicable Disease Control at the University of Exeter, told the *Independent* last week, “When the prime minister lifted lockdown, I said it was unbelievably premature. There were mixed messages... That public health message of ‘go carefully’ just isn’t there.”

Dr Gabriel Scally, President of the Epidemiology and Public Health section of the Royal Society of Medicine and member of Independent Sage, explained that “if there are too many [local flare-ups of the virus] the capacity at a local level won’t be able to deal with them and they will emerge as a wave.”

A major resurgence of the epidemic will bring tens and possibly hundreds of thousands more deaths. The longer the virus is left uncontrolled, the more damage will be done by the ongoing disruption of people's lives. The Tory government's cynical invocation of children's welfare notwithstanding, it is undoubtedly the case that world capitalism's shambolic response to the pandemic—necessitating the long-term closure of schools and other services—has caused a “generational catastrophe” for young children, in the words of the World Health Organisation.

The ruling class know that they are sitting on a ticking time bomb of unrest and are reaching for a military-police solution. A “major incident” has now been declared in Manchester, giving local police a freer hand to deploy national resources.

Early in July, the government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) heard a report, “Public Disorder and Public Health: Contemporary Threats and Risks.” Using the threat of “disorder... facilitating the spread of the disease” as a cipher for mass social opposition, the report states, “There has been a step-change in threat levels since the last sustained period of serious rioting in the UK in 2011.” It warns, “The police are in a far weaker position in terms of capacity” and that they “would be likely to require military support.”

Among the risks it foresees over the coming months are “The beginning of protests planned during the lockdown, (e.g., anarchist/anticapitalist groups seeking to frustrate a ‘return to normality’,” and “Rising unemployment and/or anxiety about employment as furlough is wound down.”

On July 22, Lieutenant General Douglas Chalmers, Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (Military Strategy and Operations), told the House of Lords' Public Services Committee that the military was wargaming scenarios for a four-way winter crisis of a coronavirus resurgence, winter flu spike, Brexit disruption, and national flooding.

This is a development of the “Operation Yellowhammer” strategy formulated last year to suppress discontent, supposedly in the wake of a hard Brexit. Once again it proceeds with the full support of Labour and other “opposition” parties.

The British ruling class are in an unprecedented state of crisis which they hope to escape through an equally unprecedented exploitation and endangering of the working class, enforced by military-police repression. The working class must respond with their own perspective and programme, based on an international struggle for socialism, for the eradication of the virus and the safeguarding of all jobs, wages, and social services.



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