

UK COVID-19 cases triple in a fortnight

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More than 14,000 new cases of COVID-19 were reported in Britain on Tuesday and Wednesday, tripling in a fortnight the number of people testing positive.

Wednesday's 14,162 cases, Tuesday's 14,542 cases, along with Monday's 12,594 new positive tests, saw cases mount to above 40,000 in the first three days of the week.

Hospitalisations due to coronavirus are also surging. The 478 people admitted to hospital Sunday—up from 386 the day previous—was the largest daily figure since early June and a one-day leap of 25 percent. This week, 165 deaths have been announced, taking the highly massaged official overall total to 42,515.

These figures shatter claims made by the government and its media apologists in recent days that the escalation in case numbers was a statistical anomaly due to a temporary “glitch” in the government's track and trace system.

The mass infections are the inevitable result of the Johnson government's herd immunity policy that led to the ending of lockdown and the reopening of the economy in June, followed by September's reopening of schools, colleges, and universities.

The trajectory is pointing toward infection rates and hospitalisations well above those levels reached during the height of the pandemic, which resulted in the loss of over 65,000 lives according to reliable excess death studies.

The UK has no adequate containment policies or functioning track and trace system in place. So-called local lockdowns, focusing on personal behaviour, while schools and workplaces remain open, has seen the virus spread like wildfire. Scientists' predictions of up to 50,000 cases and 200 deaths a day by November could yet be an underestimation.

Each day brings more horrific proof that schools and universities in particular are breeding grounds for the virus. The ToryFibs twitter account reported

Wednesday that 2,940 UK schools have infections, hundreds with multiple cases.

At least 91 of the UK's 139 universities have infections, with 5,000 confirmed cases among students and staff. At the University of Manchester more than 1,000 students and 20 staff have been infected and nearly 600 students and staff at the University of Sheffield. Manchester's two universities, the University of Sheffield, Newcastle University, Northumbria University and University of Cardiff were forced to suspend in-person teaching this week and move to online learning.

Thousands of students who were instructed to enrol—or forfeit their higher education places—have been infected within days of term starting and are locked in cramped university accommodation in all the major urban areas of the country.

These events confirm that the ruling elite is actively pursuing a policy of herd immunity, which was declared policy in March, despite denials to the contrary.

Most of the UK has levels of infection above the threshold set for foreign countries and which trigger travel restrictions by the British government. Just seven areas of Britain have a rate of less than 20 cases per 100,000 people over a seven-day average. Levels of infection in some of the major urban populations are staggering. Manchester has the highest rate in England this week with 2,763 active cases reported in the week to October 1. Its infection rate stands at 504.5 per 100,000 people, more than double the 223.2 figure the previous week and 10 times the rate recorded in August.

The government's lying claims that children and young people were not susceptible to coronavirus and that schools and colleges could reopen safely are in tatters. Coronavirus cases are rising in almost every age group. In a new study published by the *Lancet*, “The

changing demographics of COVID-19”, one of the world's most respected medical journals noted, “According to an analysis of 6 million cases [internationally] between February and July, 2020, the number of infected people aged 15–24 years increased from 4.5% to 15%...” In England, “most new infections identified between Aug 17 and 30, 2020, were in individuals aged 20–29 years.”

A glut of evidence shows how coronavirus hits the working class hardest, particularly in factory and office settings. The spread of COVID-19 in the north of England is presented in the media as a regional disparity. But the most infected areas are in deindustrialised, socially deprived regions where fewer people work from home.

Many workplace outbreaks have occurred in food processing plants, with the latest at the Karro Food pork processing plant in Scunthorpe, Lincolnshire. The site employs 360 people and is reportedly taking on another 100 staff due to increased demand from supermarkets during the lockdown. According to local media sources, workers at the plant have reported a “spate of cases”, with one saying, “Staff are dropping like flies and being sent home.”

Dr Gabriel Scally, a professor of public health at the University of Bristol and a member of the Independent SAGE group of scientists, said of the spread of the virus, “There are three key factors: the level of deprivation, secondly the level of over-crowding of domestic dwellings and, thirdly the proportion of people from BAME [black, Asian and minority ethnic] backgrounds.”

Across Europe, the homicidal reopening of schools and workplaces has created the same disastrous situation. On Tuesday, for the first time in months, deaths rose above 1,000 across the continent, a near doubling of those reported Monday. Tuesday's 83,011 new cases in Europe were a marked increase on Monday's 62,259. Wednesday saw 92,470 cases and 908 lives lost in Europe to coronavirus.

There is growing anger among workers whose safety and lives are at stake. A worker at the Karro Food plant told the media, “The factory has worked all through lockdown and now people are going off with the virus, they still refuse to close. It is putting not only their staff at risk but their families too.”

On Tuesday, staff at Northumbria University, with

nearly 800 confirmed cases among its students, voted unanimously in an emergency meeting to hold a strike ballot “after management failed to address serious health and safety concerns.” They demanded the immediate resignation of the university's vice-chancellor, Andrew Wathey.

The threat to life faced by millions of workers, students and school children is the result of the dirty work of Labour and the trade unions which have worked in partnership with the Tories, big business and management to facilitate the return to work. The Trades Union Congress drafted policies to be discussed with the Johnson government “on how to manage the mass return to work.” Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer insisted in August, “I don't just want all children back at school next month, I expect them back at school. No ifs, no buts, no equivocation.” The National Education Union's Joint General-Secretary Mary Bousted declared, “Reopening schools is a question of logistics, not of risks.”

As in every country, a mass movement from below is required to enforce the necessary programme to combat the spread of COVID-19. In every workplace and community, new organisations of struggle, rank-and-file committees, must be formed, independent of the unions and Labour, to prepare a political general strike.

The SEP has established the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee to oppose the unsafe return to schools, universities, and colleges. Share your experiences since returning to schools and campuses by attending our next online meeting on Saturday October 10 at 2 pm.



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