

# French government whitewashes COVID-19 clusters in schools, universities

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It is now two months since the reopening of schools and universities in France. On September 1, when the first schools and universities began instruction for the autumn term, there were 3,082 confirmed cases. Sunday's figure of 52,013 new cases represents an astronomic increase of 1,700 percent in a little under two months. On Saturday, 298 COVID-19 deaths were recorded, the highest number since May 14. It is increasingly clear that schools and universities have played a central role in fueling the mounting death toll.

The reopening of in-person education has been a central element of the anti-scientific and murderous policy of "herd immunity" overseen by the French government. The major banks and corporations see opening schools and universities as necessary to allow the population to remain at work for the continued extraction of profit from the working class. The government has flatly denied the spread of the virus among students. Each such lie is a deadly crime against the working class.

As part of this effort, last week French Health Minister Olivier Véran denied the significance of figures showing that 60 percent of clusters had been recorded in workplaces, schools and universities.

In what amounts to an effective admission that clusters are being ignored, he tweeted that "60 percent of clusters only accounts for 10 percent of cases," and one could not "confuse clusters and diagnostics." A cluster is defined as at least three or more confirmed or suspected cases of COVID-19 among people in the same community or who participated in the same gathering.

Up until October 11, only 3.6 percent of the cases in the Île-de-France region, including Paris and the surrounding areas, had been linked to clusters. This is despite the near-capacity use of the metro, a full return

to work, and a virtually complete restart of education in the region.

Véran and the French state would have the population believe that 90 percent (96 percent in the Paris region) of case transmissions in the country are simply one-off events, with no connection to workers and students being forced into close quarters on a daily basis. This narrative is also crucial for attempts to convince the public that the recently introduced 9:00 p.m. curfew is an effective measure against the virus. In reality, the curfew's sole purpose is to allow the government to claim it is fighting the virus while it follows a herd immunity policy.

It also functions as a convenient excuse to occupy the streets of the capital with 12,000 police officers.

In fact, the health ministry's official advice for universities includes a host of anti-scientific measures. For example, students who test positive for the virus are required to quarantine for only seven days, as opposed to the 14 as advised by the World Health Organization. Furthermore, despite the scientifically established inadequacy of a one-meter distance and mask wearing, students who are exposed to the virus are considered contact cases only if this occurred without a mask. Even when rules are adhered to, the educational environment is deadly.

These measures fly in the face of established science. A collaborative study between the University of Montpellier and Princeton University has shown that the virus can be transmitted over two meters from asymptomatic individuals during speech. The study also acknowledges that although masks are beneficial, they are no guarantee against transmission. It concludes, "Most significantly, our results illustrate that 2 m, or 6 feet, do not represent a 'wall.'" Testimony from students in a number of French

universities has shown that even the 1m rule is regularly ignored.

In a denunciation of the anti-scientific “herd immunity” policy, the *Lancet*, the leading British medical journal, warned: “Uncontrolled transmission in younger people risks significant morbidity and mortality across the whole population.”

In one example of the extent of the continuing spread at universities, Lisa, a student at the *École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs*, told the WSWS that in a recent round of testing, half of the students at the school had tested positive for the virus.

The WSWS has already exposed the efforts within the French education system to prevent students from knowing they have been exposed to positive individuals. Determined to keep classes running at all costs, French universities are willing to trample on the right of students to know if they have been exposed to a deadly disease. One can only speculate how many students have been unknowingly exposed to the virus and have then gone on to infect their relatives and family members, believing they were safe.

The abandonment of efforts to contain the virus has dovetailed with the attempt to shift the blame for the majority of new cases on social gatherings, particularly those involving youth. In cases where young people do socialize recklessly, responsibility lies first and foremost with the government and media.

For months, students and young people, in particular, have been told to “do their bit” to help the economy by resuming a regular social life, and that their youth effectively provides immunity to the virus. In addition to the role played by young people in the spread of the virus, it should be noted that at least 40 people under 30 have died from the virus and its long-term effects are still unclear.

The full consequences of the wanton disregard of science and social rights by the French government is beginning to become clear. On Monday, Jean-Francois Delfraissy, the president of the Scientific Council, warned listeners of RTL radio, “The second wave will surely be stronger than the first,” ominously adding, “Many of our fellow citizens are not yet aware of what lies ahead.” He added that he believed the real number of daily infections was closer to 100,000, as the current testing infrastructure is not able to keep pace with the contagion.

There is a very real danger of tens or hundreds of thousands of deaths in France over the coming months. Guided by the interests of the financial aristocracy and its need for the continued extraction of profit, the French government has mercilessly enforced a de facto herd immunity policy. In reality, every death is a social murder, consciously prepared and carried out by the cabal of criminal capitalist politicians at the head of the French state.

To prevent an even larger loss of life, universities and schools must immediately return to online learning. This must be accompanied by the closure of all non-essential workplaces. Full financial support and housing for all during a renewed lockdown must be provided. The time it takes to bring about these necessary measures should be used to introduce a vast expansion of testing and contact tracing to finally contain the virus. This must be funded by the requisitioning of the hundreds of billions of euros given to the banks at the beginning of the pandemic.



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