

Coronavirus pandemic spreads in France despite partial lockdown policies

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In the face of the delayed and insufficient confinement measures implemented by the Macron administration, with schools and non-essential industries open, the coronavirus pandemic is continuing to spread outside of control in France.

In a press conference Monday, health director Jérôme Salomon warned that the “peak” remained “ahead of us,” and “the second wave is continuing.” He reported another 551 deaths in the previous 24 hours, bringing the total to 40,987. There are now 4,539 people in urgent care beds, up from 3,730 only one week ago. The total capacity of urgent care beds, assuming that other critical operations are cancelled or delayed to free space, is 7,500 nationally.

Another 38,619 new cases were recorded Monday, when figures are always artificially suppressed due to lower testing on the weekend. On Saturday, due to an accumulation of uncounted cases from previous days, almost 90,000 cases were reported. Friday marked a new daily record of almost 60,000 cases, which per capita would be equivalent to almost 300,000 daily cases in the United States. The rolling seven-day average of cases in France is now almost 42,000. The average death rate over the last seven days in hospital is 364.

The spread of the pandemic is an exposure of the criminal policies pursued by the ruling class in France and across Europe. At the end of spring, governments forced workers back to work in order to reopen the economy and boost corporate profits. Across Europe, a race took place as to who could most rapidly dismantle all precautions. The second wave of curfews and partial lockdowns were both deliberately delayed and insufficient to contain the renewed upsurge.

As early as August, there was a very clear resurgence of the pandemic, at varying rates in different countries.

Spain showed the earliest clear signs of the second wave, but the central government still refuses to enforce lockdown measures requested by local regions. In Germany, the previous peak from April will be exceeded in two to three weeks. Belgium is again the hardest hit European country, and its hospital system is on the verge of collapse. Italy has introduced regional curfews and partial lockdowns. In Switzerland, where very few precautionary measures are in force, several cantons are reaching their maximum capacity of urgent care beds.

In the UK, Johnson admitted to MPs that deaths this winter could be twice as great or more than the first wave.

Measures to combat the epidemic have been calibrated to minimize any impact on economic activity and corporate profits. Serious measures in late August to early September, before the school and university system was reopened, could still have been effective. The French government made the conscious decision to allow the pandemic to develop out of control.

The Pasteur Institute has developed scenarios based on the lockdown proposals submitted by the government. According to *Le Monde*, scientists estimate that the virus’ reproduction rate (the R0 value) could fall to 0.9—compared to 0.7 during the first containment—but they also envisage a “pessimistic scenario,” with an R0, of 1.2 where the number of cases would continue to increase exponentially.

Even the “optimistic scenario” shows that the government is not serious about containing the epidemic and has planned to let it spread at an extraordinarily high level throughout the winter. The impact on the already strained health system will be devastating.

Reflecting the disorganized nature of pandemic

monitoring and the increase in cases, the French national health system has encountered difficulties reporting daily data on the evolution of cases over the last two weeks, which has led to uncertainties about the actual evolution of the epidemic since the beginning of the lockdown.

The available data indicate that the R_0 reached a peak of 1.42 when the lockdown was imposed, equivalent to a doubling of new cases every 2 weeks. By Friday, it reportedly had fallen to 1.31.

The rate of contamination in social services, which includes care homes for the elderly, has increased significantly. As of mid-October, there was an average of 36 deaths per day in such institutes, and 27 in hospitals.

During the week from October 21-28, the most recent week with available data, there was a dramatic increase in the ratio of average daily deaths in institutes to hospitals, with 74 deaths in institutes and 36 in hospitals. As during the first wave, this may indicate first signs of refusals to take the elderly into emergency care, linked to the overflowing of hospital and intensive care services. This trend is likely to become more pronounced and contribute to a sharp increase in mortality among the elderly.

The reopening of the university and school system contributed in a major way to the epidemic explosion from September onwards. The Ministry of Education has made constant attempts to conceal the seriousness of the outbreak.

Faced with the overcrowded conditions in the schools and the deliberate endangerment of students and teachers, spontaneous strikes and demonstrations by high school students broke out after the announcement of the partial lockdown, which included the condition that schools would remain open. They developed outside of the control of the trade unions, and the government responded with a police crackdown against protesting high school students.

Finally, in apparent fear of a widespread social explosion spreading from the school system, Health Minister Jean-Michel Blanquer suddenly announced that high schools would be able to alternate classes online and in-person, having previously refused any such measures. The details have not been specified, and nothing has been prepared or tested.

There is no provision for middle schools or primary

schools, even though the health problems are the same as in high school. The government is clearly determined to prevent requests for leaves of absence from work and compensation for parents.

The limited measures taken in France and in Europe show that governments consider that hundreds of daily coronavirus deaths constitute the new normal.



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