

London becomes epicentre of pandemic in the UK

Robert Stevens**14 December 2020**

London, the capital and most populated area in the UK with nearly 9 million residents, is now the epicentre of the pandemic.

Every one of London's 32 boroughs is seeing an increase in COVID-19 cases. In the week to December 9, London recorded 242 cases per 100,000 people—the highest rate of any region in England. This represented a 40.5 jump in cases on the previous week. One London borough, Havering, recorded the fifth highest rate of all new COVID-19 cases in England. There are more than 2,000 patients with Covid in London's hospitals--up from just over 1,000 a month ago.

On Monday, Conservative Health Secretary Matt Hancock announced that London, much of the adjacent county of Essex, and some of Hertfordshire, will be placed under the highest Tier 3 restriction level from midnight today. The *Daily Telegraph* cited a health ministry source who said that the latest data on infections in London was "terrifying," and significantly worse than those of northern cities Liverpool and Manchester when they entered the highest tier. How catastrophic is the spread of the virus in the capital is clear in that Greater London's population is over 3 times as large as Greater Manchester's.

The engulfing of London's population by the virus is the direct consequence of the government's homicidal herd immunity policy. On December 3, Prime Minister Boris Johnson ended a month-long national, albeit limited, lockdown, which did not include workplaces, schools or colleges, and brought in its ineffectual Tier system to "save Christmas", i.e., the profits of the corporations at what is normally their busiest time of the year. This was accompanied by the criminal move, in the middle of a pandemic, to allow *all shops nationally to open for 24 hours a day in December and January*.

Shoppers were encouraged to flood the high streets, with the pro-Labour Party *Daily Mirror*'s front page, "Go shop for Britain," typical. Encouraged by government propaganda and the media, for weeks London's main shopping streets and shopping centres have been teeming with people packed together like sardines. London's shops are national and

international destinations. Nothing has been put in place to curtail the influx into London during the holiday season, enabling the disease to spread like wildfire and not just in the capital.

Keeping schools open since their re-opening in September, has had even more devastating consequences. Despite it being confirmed within days of this decision that schools were the cause of up to 50 percent of coronavirus infections in communities, they were kept open for the sole purpose of ensuring that parents were able to go to work.

After months of lies that schools were "Covid-safe" zones, the situation in London has blown these claims apart. On Sunday, the Royal Borough of Greenwich in the south east of the capital announced it was closing all its schools from the end of day on Monday and moving classes online. In an open letter the Greenwich's Labour Party council leader Danny Thorpe declared that he had been briefed by "Public Health England that the pandemic in Greenwich is now showing signs that we are in a period of exponential growth that demands immediate action." In just this one borough 90 schools, tens of thousands of children, and hundreds of thousands of people in their families are affected.

Greenwich's infection rate shot up by 48.6 percent, from 151.4 per 100,000 to 225 cases per 100,000 people in the first week of December.

Greenwich is only the 14th worse borough in London for COVID infections. Havering, in the east of the city, recorded 1,314 new cases to December 9 and has over double the cases of Greenwich, with 470.8 per 100,000 people. Five London boroughs—Redbridge, Waltham Forest, Barking and Dagenham, Enfield, and Newham—are all in the top 25 areas with the highest rates in England.

On Monday, another London council, Islington, announced that it would close all the schools within its boundaries from the end of Tuesday and continue online learning until January 11. Islington Council leader Richard Watts, also Labour, said, "There is a serious and very worrying rise in coronavirus across London, with cases doubling every few days."

Essex County Council announced that nearly all secondary schools in Basildon, just 26 miles from the capital, have moved to full remote education.

These measures are too little, too late. It is proven that the Tier system is inadequate to contain the virus. Under Tier 3, all shops are still able to remain open, with only pubs, restaurants and cafes having to close (except for takeaway services). Indoor entertainment venues such as cinemas, theatres and bowling alleys also close. Hancock confirmed that there is still no ban on people coming to London for pre-Christmas shopping, as he only advised that outside Tier 3 should not come to London for shopping.

The government is refusing to accept the move by the London councils to close schools. On Monday, Regional Schools Commissioner Claire Burton wrote to Greenwich and Islington councils threatening that, under schedule 17 of the Coronavirus Act 2020, the government "could make a direction to require schools to enable all pupils to attend full-time... I would ask you to reconsider your position immediately and retract your message to schools."

The government has already used the extraordinary powers it has under the Coronavirus Act—that it passed in March and renewed in September with Labour backing—to ensure that schools were kept open in the north east of England.

Of all the UK's cities the contrast between the richest and poorest is the starker in London. Entire streets and gated communities are comprised of houses and mansions worth tens of millions, located just a stone's throw from areas marked by entrenched poverty.

The central concerns of the Tories and Labour Party throughout the pandemic has been to ensure the profit interests of the capitalist class. In the lead-up to Hancock's decision, former Tory leader and London MP, Sir Iain Duncan Smith, denounced to the *Daily Mail* any suggestion that London could be put into the highest tier as an "unmitigated disaster". He insisted, "London is the powerhouse of the UK economy, we must not be moved into Tier Three". Attacking the move in parliament after Hancock announced the measure, Felicity Buchan, Tory MP for Kensington, one of the most socially polarized areas on the planet and the location of the Grenfell Tower inferno, said in like fashion, "Whether this House likes it not, central London is the powerhouse of our national economy".

The main concern of Labour's London Mayor Sadiq Khan ahead of Hancock's announcement was not for the safety of millions of people, but that the impending move to Tier 3 was "catastrophic to our hospitality, to our culture and to retail."

Khan has played a criminal role in the spread of coronavirus. Speaking to LBC radio Monday he said that the move to Tier 3 was a "blunt instrument" as the main sources

of infections were not hospitality venues, but schools and colleges (he never mentioned workplaces). Earlier Monday, Khan and Georgia Gould, the chair of London Councils, wrote to Johnson calling for the closure from Tuesday of secondary schools, sixth forms, and further education colleges, and an expansion of community testing. "The biggest spread of the virus in the capital is within education settings and specifically amongst the 10-19 year old age group."

Khan conceals the fact that he was instrumental in backing the government and opposition Labour Party's back to school order in September. This led to over 250,000 school children in London being sent back to the classrooms, vastly increasing the spread of the virus.

London is the new epicentre of the virus, but it continues to spread nationally. Another 232 deaths were recorded yesterday with cases of COVID-19 increasing 14 percent in the last week. In the week to December 9, 208 out of 315 local authority areas recorded a week-on-week increase. With London's population under Tier 3, this means that 34 million people will be in that tier and 21.5 million in tier two.

These appalling figures could be the tip of the iceberg, with Hancock announcing in parliament that a new variant of COVID-19 has been discovered that "may be associated with the fastest spread in the south-east of England." He stated that "initial analysis suggests that this variant is growing faster than the existing variants. We've currently identified over 1,000 cases with this variant, predominantly in the south of England, although cases have been identified in nearly 60 different local authority areas, and numbers are increasing rapidly."



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