The UK's COVID-19 mutation: The deadly result of a "herd immunity" policy

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The UK recorded nearly 700 more COVID-19 deaths (691) yesterday and a further 36,804 new cases of the disease.

This brings the official death toll, based on measuring the number of deaths of people who perished within 28 days of a positive test, to 68,307—the second highest in Europe after Italy. Taking into account fatalities where COVID-19 is mentioned on the death certificate, UK deaths stand at around 80,000. Yesterday, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) revealed that excess deaths—above expected levels since the start of the pandemic in March—had reached 81,300.

The same day the *Times* led with the headline "Mutant virus strain is 'everywhere'". This was their take-away from comments made by the Conservative government's Chief Scientific Officer Sir Patrick Vallance at Monday evening's Downing Street press briefing.

Vallance, speaking alongside Prime Minister Boris Johnson, said, "The new variant is spread around the country… It's localised in some places but we know there are cases everywhere, so it's not as though we can stop this getting into other places, there's some there already."

Vallance said there was no evidence that the mutation, known as VUI-202012/01, was more dangerous than the original strain, "so if you catch it the disease looks the same as any other form of Covid infection". But he acknowledged that it was "more transmissible, which is why we see it growing so fast and spreading to so many areas."

The danger to the individual infected is not the primary issue here. A more transmissible virus will infect more people more quickly, leading to hospitalisations that could easily overwhelm the National Health Service and therefore lead to more deaths. Yet Vallance, Pilate like, simply declared that there would be a further spike in cases very soon after an "inevitable period of mixing" over Christmas.

This is only a certainty because the government has *allowed* it to happen, in the full knowledge of the deadly implications of such gatherings. Millions were told by the government they could gather in household "bubbles" of three for a five-day period from December 23. It was only after the deadly consequences of the new strain could no longer be concealed that the government was forced last Saturday to introduce more restrictive Tier 4 measures covering London and much of the south east.

As at every other stage in this pandemic, the Johnson government had ample time to take the necessary measures required to save lives and avoid a catastrophic situation. Yet they did nothing.

According to available facts, the new strain was first detected on September 20, 2020, in Kent, South East England. It was detected by the Covid-19 Genomics UK (COG-UK) consortium, which undertakes random genetic sequencing of positive COVID-19 samples around the UK. Established in April this year, COG-UK is a partnership of the UK's four public health agencies, the Wellcome Sanger Institute, and 12 academic institutions. It has sequenced 140,000 virus genomes from people infected with COVID-19.

A swab test from a patient with the mutation was sent September 20 from Public Health England's Lighthouse Lab in Milton Keynes to the Porton Down military laboratory in Wiltshire for analysis.

At that stage there were around 3,700 daily cases of COVID-19, but due to government policy the UK epidemic was already beginning a resurgence, undoing the curtailing of its spread during the national lockdown in place for over 2 months from March 23.

September was the month that all schools were reopened, followed by colleges and universities, after being in lockdown for several months. So determined were the government to have the parents of children back in workplaces and generating profits for their friends in big business that the order for the schools to be reopened was made as early as July 2. Education settings would be a crucial means for the untrammelled spread of the virus.

In early October, the swab tested positive for the new strain and the Department of Health was informed, but apparently not government ministers.

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By early November, the virus had spread rapidly, with nearly 30 percent of all infections in London testing positive for the new variant. By mid-December, the mutated virus was responsible for nearly two-thirds of cases in the capital.

According to reports, the New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Advisory Group (NERVTAG) committee, which advises England's Chief Medical Officer Chris Whitty, was supposedly not given information about the mutation until early December. Channel 4's factcheck site reported, "Scientific advisers say the alarm was not raised about the potential danger of increased transmissibility from VUI-202012/01 until December 8."

NERVTAG chair Professor Peter Horby said the first preliminary data about the virus was handed to NERVTAG only on December 11 and it was discussed by them that day.

It wasn't until December 14, 85 days after the mutation was first detected, that the government was supposedly finally informed and reported the mutation to the World Health Organization.

That day Health Secretary Matt Hancock told parliament that over 1,100 cases of the new strain had been identified in nearly 60 different local authorities. According to a December 16 *British Medical Journal* article, "the true number will be much higher."

On December 18, NERVTAG reportedly informed ministers about the "substantial increase in transmissibility" resulting from the new strain.

The following day, December 19, Whitty and Vallance decided it would be a good idea to attend a NERVTAG meeting to discuss its spread.

The same day, Johnson made his public announcement of Tier 4 measures with no household mixing and a limit on Christmas gatherings to December 25 in other tier areas.

The entire episode reveals that the government's COVID-19 infrastructure is criminally dysfunctional, with the work of scientists carrying out crucial work in identifying new strains, including VUI-202012/01, being ignored for months.

Any system in which public health was the first priority would have seen a body such as NERVTAG—in possession of knowledge regarding the great danger posed by the mutation—insisting on a national lockdown.

Moreover, not only would a government operating on the same basis have instant access to this information of life and death importance. It would have no need to be told to impose one because the first lockdown would still have been in place until the virus had been properly contained.

Ultimately the spread of the new strain "everywhere", including in a growing number of countries outside Britain, is not down to rank incompetence but due to government policy.

The new strain developed and then spread under conditions where nothing is being allowed to come before the interests of the corporations and their raking in ever greater profits. Even when told on December 14 of how infectious the new strain was, Johnson still told the UK population, two days later, that it would be "frankly inhuman" to scrap existing plans for a three household "bubble", five-day Christmas, and to have shops open 24 hours a day.

All workplaces of course remained open. Moreover, December 14 was the same day that Education Secretary Gavin Williamson threatened legal action against three London councils, Greenwich, Islington and Waltham Forest, unless they reversed their instructions that schools in their areas close a few days earlier for Christmas—under conditions in which London had become the epicentre for the spread of COVID-19 and schools were among the main vectors.

The government has been guided throughout the pandemic, despite having to put in place highly inadequate restrictions from time to time, by its brutal "herd immunity" agenda. Their declared policy at the outset was that as much of the population as possible should be infected with the virus, no matter the cost to lives.

Last March, the *Times* reported that Johnson's then main advisor, Dominic Cummings, explained the government's coronavirus policy at a closed doors event held in London at the end of February. Those present, reported the newspaper, summarised Cummings' position as "herd immunity, protect the economy, and if that means some pensioners die, too bad."

On March 5, Johnson said on a TV show, "perhaps you could take it on the chin, take it all in one go and allow the disease, as it were, to move through the population, without taking as many draconian measures."

Seven days later, on March 12, Chief Scientific Officer Vallance declared alongside Johnson at a Downing Street briefing, "It's not possible to stop everyone getting it, and it's also not desirable."

This, a policy of death, has let the COVID-19 virus in all its variants spread virtually without hindrance, leading to the horrific situation millions face today.

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