

Over 600,000 dead from coronavirus in Europe

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More than 600,000 people have died of coronavirus in Europe, according to the official statistics tabulated by Worldometer, which includes Russia in its count. The continent surpassed the horrific marker earlier this week.

Every three weeks another approximately 100,000 people are dying from the virus on the continent. The total of 300,000 deaths was passed near November 10; 400,000 at the end of that month; and half a million three days before Christmas.

More than one in 1,000 people alive in Europe at the beginning of 2020 have died from the coronavirus. Per million people in the population, the number of dead is over 1,700 in Belgium, 1,477 in Slovenia, 1,330 in Italy, 1,245 in the UK, 1,131 in Spain. Another 1,060 people were reported dead in Germany in the past 24 hours, bringing the country's death toll to 43,203.

These numbers are a significant underestimate of the real number. In Spain, the official death toll is 52,878, but the number of "excess deaths" above the historical norm—a better indication of deaths due to the pandemic—is 83,700.

Yet scientists are warning that the pandemic is entering into an even more catastrophic stage than anything that has preceded it. It is propelled by the rapid spread of the new, more contagious variant identified in September in the UK, and consciously facilitated by the criminal policies of European governments. Even as health care systems are being overwhelmed, schools and non-essential workplaces are being kept open, despite their role as transmitters of the virus, to ensure that no amount of death prevents the smooth and profitable functioning of business.

The clearest warning of what is being prepared can be seen in the UK. Yesterday set a new record of 1,564 deaths. In a country the size of the United States, this

would have meant more than 7,700 deaths in 24 hours. Another 47,525 new cases were reported over the same period.

The new strain of the virus is now the dominant one in the UK. In Ireland, where the new variant was first detected for the first time on Christmas Day, new cases have skyrocketed from 250 confirmed cases per million people at the beginning of the year to over 1,200 now, a five-fold increase in the space of two weeks.

Across Europe, variants identified in the UK, South Africa and Brazil have been detected in over a dozen countries, yet it remains unknown to what extent it has already established itself throughout the population.

France gives a particularly clear example of the authorities' failure to track the spread. The first case of the UK variant was detected in Tours at the end of December. As late as the second week of January, media reports on the number of detected cases indicated that there were between 10 and 20 confirmed such cases. On January 12, Olivier Véran, the health minister, spoke before the National Assembly and reported that the new strain contributed to "approximately one percent of the 100,000 tests conducted in France."

Yet this appears to be a significant underestimate, and varies greatly according to location. Patrice Hérisson, regional director of the medical laboratory Cerballiance in Saint Denis, near Paris, told *Le Parisien* on Tuesday that "10 to 15 percent of our positive cases in Île-de-France are identified as suspected English variants."

Laurent Kbaier, a biologist with the testing lab Biogroup, told the daily that "out of 826 positive PCR tests on Thursday and Friday at our laboratories in Île-de-France, we found 74 suspected cases of the English mutant," slightly less than 10 percent.

Philippe Froguel, a professor of genomics at Imperial

College London and in Lille, France, told the *Financial Times* Monday that it was likely the variant was well established in France. He said that by February, “I’m afraid we’ll be in exactly the same situation as the UK with 50-60,000 new cases a day and a large number of dead.”

The variant has also been detected in Belgium, which saw a 76 percent increase in the seven-day case total to last Thursday compared to the previous week in the capital Brussels.

In Valencia, Spain, two patients with no connections to the UK were tested positive for the variant last week, demonstrating that community transmission is taking place. “It’s clear that there is community transmission, but we don’t know at what level,” Fernando González Candelas, a genetics researcher in Valencia, told the *FT*.

On Wednesday, EU health commissioner Stella Kyriakides declared that Europe “cannot be complacent” toward the new strain. “We cannot let it get out of hand. So we are ready to help member states in the area of genomic sequencing of samples. There is no way around this.”

Yet not only have European governments allowed the virus to develop “out of hand,” they are consciously pursuing policies that will allow a further uncontrolled spread of the virus. They are determined to keep schools open in order to allow parents to continue to work. Wherever schools have been forced to close, as in the UK, it has only been due to the action of educators or the government’s fear of popular opposition of teachers, parents and students to the de-facto policy of herd immunity.

In France, schools remain open, even though scientists have warned that the new strain appears to be particularly contagious among youth. On social media, French teachers have reported that even when there is a confirmed case among students, they cannot send children home for testing. “We can’t send them home if they are a contact case to get tested,” Laeti commented on the “Stylos Rouges” Facebook page. “For us children under 11 years old are not considered as at-risk contacts,” added Jucilou.

Yesterday, the Portuguese government announced a general lock-down, which it said would be the same as that imposed in April, with the exception that all schools are to remain open.

Last week, in the Westphalian town of Kamen, a 44-year-old educator died following an outbreak in a daycare centre. According to the Robert Koch institute, five educators have died from coronavirus since December in Germany.

If left in the hands of the capitalist governments across Europe, the result will be hundreds of thousands of further unnecessary deaths. Their policy of death must be countered by the unified struggle of the working class across Europe. Schools and non-essential workplaces must be closed, with living wages provided to everyone, and full compensation provided to small businesses.

The Socialist Equality Parties call for the formation of independent rank-and-file committees in schools and workplaces, for the organization of a general strike to enforce a scientific response to the pandemic. The homicidal policy of the capitalist elite has demonstrated the bankruptcy of the social order of capitalism, and the necessity of its replacement with a planned socialist society on an international scale, organized according to social need, not private profit.



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