

UK: Boris Johnson's herd immunity government readies "irreversible" measures to end the "last lockdown"

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16 February 2021

The Conservative government is making the final preparations for what UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson describes as a "roadmap" to exit the pandemic. What will in fact be outlined next Monday is a timetable for the loss of many thousands more lives to a deadly and constantly mutating disease.

At Monday's Downing Street press conference Johnson said, "Next week I will be setting out a roadmap saying as much as we possibly can about the route to normality even though some things are very uncertain. Because we want this lockdown to be the last. And we want progress to be cautious but also irreversible."

As with the premature endings of the previous two lockdowns, reopening schools is at the centre of the government's agenda. According to the *Daily Mirror*, "Schools will be the first to reopen from March 8, while outdoor 'recreation' is likely to resume around the same time... Non-essential shops will open next, followed finally by hospitality venues, in plans being examined by Downing Street."

Johnson is speaking about irreversible moves away from lockdowns under conditions in which the pandemic is still taking the lives of thousands of people with record numbers still hospitalised. Johnson acknowledged, "[T]he level of infection remains very high, with more people still in hospital today than at the peak last April and admissions running at 1,600 a day."

Only in recent days have daily deaths begun falling to three figures. As recently as the week ending February 5, the Office for National Statistics announced 7,320 deaths (over a thousand a day) in England and Wales last week where "novel coronavirus" was mentioned on the death certificate.

The Tories herd immunity policy has overseen what the *British Medical Journal* described as "social murder."

Tuesday's almost 800 COVID-19 fatalities took the government's official toll of deaths to 118,195—the highest tally among any country in Europe and tens of thousands more deaths than Italy (94,171).

The UK has the fifth highest number of deaths to Covid globally and its death rate per million population (1,724) is the highest in the world among nations with an equivalent or larger population.

Johnson stated in reply to questions that he could not guarantee that schools would all reopen on March 8, but this was the aim. Such caveats and all the talk of exercising caution is only the packaging required to allow a continuation of the herd immunity policy that has already claimed at least 126,000 lives, according to excess deaths, as modelled by the *Financial Times*.

On Monday, further details emerged about a new mutation of the virus first detected in mid-December in Britain. The B.1.525 strain, with 38 cases already detected in the UK, may have originated in Nigeria, but has already spread to 11 countries including the US, Canada and Denmark. Given that the B117 strain of the virus, first detected in the Kent, England last September, is present in at least 82 countries and is the dominant strain in a number of them, it is ominous that the new B.1.525 strain also carries the E484K mutation found in the Kent variant and the highly contagious South African and Brazilian variants.

Under conditions in which there are still around 10,000 new infections being reported daily in Britain, the statement of a government official Tuesday revealed why Johnson's verbal contortions are necessary. "We need to drive infection rates down much lower than they are right now to avoid the mutations you get when there is high prevalence," the official said. "The reason numbers are coming down now is by and large not vaccine-related yet,

even though there are some early signs. If you unlock from a high level of people in hospital, then numbers will go straight back up again—we saw that happen in Israel. We cannot deal with high levels of it knocking around—we need much, much lower levels.”

Johnson is seeking to cover up his criminal agenda with saccharine phrases due to fear of an explosive reaction in the working class.

Telegraph columnist Ross Clark outlined the concerns of the ruling elite in an opinion piece published last Saturday Referencing comments by the health secretary that Covid would be viewed by the end of the year as a “disease we can live with, like flu”, Clark’s piece was headlined, “Matt Hancock may be ready to 'live with the virus'—but is Britain?”

Clark complained that “the pandemic has managed to shift [public] opinion, possibly for good. Death has become less tolerable.”

Nevertheless, Johnson’s insistence on moving “irreversibly” out of lockdown expresses the real intentions of a party whose sole genuine concern is the profit drive of the major corporations.

Steve Baker MP is a leading figure in the 70-strong Covid Recovery Group of Tory MPs. He wrote in an op-Ed in the *Daily Telegraph* February 14, “[W]e must focus on how we open up society in the short run. The priority is getting all pupils back into school by 8 March, opening hospitality by Easter and a free life by 1 May once we have vaccinated groups 1-9. Then we must ensure that any future restrictions undergo proper analysis and scrutiny. We cannot live in a society where lockdowns are perpetually on the table...”

Mehring Books, the publishing arm of the Socialist Equality Party (US), is proud to announce the publication in epub format of Volume 1 of *COVID, Capitalism, and Class War: A Social and Political Chronology of the Pandemic*, a compilation of the *World Socialist Web Site's* coverage of this global crisis.

The media was in no doubt about Johnson’s real intentions. The *Daily Mail* proclaimed on its front page, “Now it's ready, steady, shop!” The *Daily Mirror*, which backs the opposition Labour Party who are part of a de facto coalition government with Johnson, wrote that next week’s speech would outline, “The road to freedom’.

The pandemic has exposed the pretensions of the Scottish National Party (SNP) devolved government in Edinburgh to be a progressive alternative to the Tory and Labour parties. Last August 11, three weeks ahead of the Johnson government’s reopening schools in England

from September 3, the SNP reopened schools in Scotland. Predictably, schools, colleges and universities throughout the UK became major vectors of the disease, contributing to an even greater loss of life in the second wave of the pandemic.

Yesterday, SNP First Minister Nicola Sturgeon announced that Scottish schools will be reopened in stages beginning February 22, three weeks before the March 8 date being contemplated by the Tories.

It is a certainty that due to these criminal decisions even more deaths will be lost in another wave of the virus. The *R* (Reproduction) value has only just fallen below 1—after fully seven months—because national lockdown restrictions were imposed in November and January, and, under pressure from teachers and parents, schools were finally closed in January. Now, these gains are to be destroyed as the homicidal policy of fully reopening the economy is once again being green lighted, despite scientists warning of the dire consequences.

On Tuesday, ITV ran an interview with Professor Azra Ghani, a chair in Infectious Disease Epidemiology at the Faculty of Medicine, School of Public Health. Professor Ghani explained forecasts by Imperial College’s new modelling system, COVIDSIM. It forecasts a significant wave of deaths by summer 2021 if restrictions are eased in July, even with a successful vaccine rollout.

Over two months after the vaccination rollout began, only 15 million of the UK’s 66 million population (less than 25 percent) have received even one dose of the required two doses of the vaccine, with millions of vulnerable people still in danger of infection. Less than 1 percent of the population have received two doses.

Ghani said of the virus, “The problem is that it is highly transmissible. We now have these new variants in place that we know are even more transmissible than previously, and not everybody will be vaccinated for various reasons. That can lead to subsequent epidemics if we just relaxed everything straight away.

“If we just allowed everything to open up for example at the beginning of the summer, then we would potentially see a quite a large new wave of infections occurring and tens of thousands of deaths could occur as a result.”



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