In “third wave,” coronavirus cases surging in France

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While the Macron government in France has implemented extremely limited and belated lockdown measures, a catastrophe is unfolding across the country and Europe. Using the distribution of vaccines to a small portion of the population as a justification, Macron is seeking to reopen the economy as quickly as possible. The short lockdown period of two weeks will not allow for a significant reduction in contaminations.

In an interview with world news agency AFP, epidemiologist Dominique Costagliola referred sceptically to the government’s announced lockdown timetable. “For the moment, it’s early to assess the impact,” he said. “In May we won’t have reached the levels [of vaccination] permitting us to relax the lockdown measures significantly. If it means we have a fourth wave, I don’t think it would be a good idea.”

A study published Tuesday by the Pasteur Institute also warned that because of the so-called UK variant, which is more contagious than the previously dominant strain, 90 percent of the adult population would have to be vaccinated before they could return to normal life without the risk of an epidemic resurgence. Currently, 10 million people, or about 18.7 percent of the country’s total population, have received one dose, and roughly a third of those require a second dose. Due to delays and the poor organisation of the vaccination campaign, many elderly people are still not vaccinated.

This month France will pass 100,000 deaths. The ruling class has sought to normalise this level of mass death as part of its drive to extract profit from the labour of workers in France and Europe without constraint.

Its policy demands that workers remain at their workplaces and that schools remain open so that parents can continue to go to work. That is why the ruling class is opposed to any serious lockdown policy. Macron is adamantly refusing to close schools, which health professionals have demanded for months.

Despite the denials of Education Minister Jean-Michel Blanquer, schools have become the main vectors for the spread of the virus. Previously, the government’s policy maintained that classes should only close if three students in the class tested positive. With the inevitable delays involved in detecting and reporting cases, entire schools were allowed to become infected.

The policy of “herd immunity” deliberately pursued in the school system met with no serious opposition from the trade unions, which supported the policy of face-to-face teaching and the maintenance of nonessential production at all costs. The unions actively opposed any calls for strike action to close schools.

Only when the government was confronted with angry parents and teachers refusing to work, amid an explosion of cases at the end of March, did Blanquer announce that classes should close as soon as a single student tested positive. Immediately, this led to a sharp rise in class closures. Ultimately, Macron was forced to announce on March 31 that nurseries, kindergartens and schools would be closed until April 26. Collèges and lycées, or upper-level secondary schools, would be closed until May 3 which includes a two-week holiday.

This is insufficient time to hope to stop the spread of the epidemic.

As a result of the delayed lockdown policy, the milestone of 30,000 COVID-19 patients hospitalised in France has been passed. As of yesterday, there were 30,671 hospitalisations, close to the peak of the first wave (32,292) and the second wave (33,466 cases). More than 5,700 people are in intensive care, well above the second wave peak of 4,903 on November 16. In the first wave, the peak was 7,000 people, in April

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According to the daily *Le Monde*, on April 1, 7,900 beds were available in intensive care units, 90 percent of which were occupied by both COVID-19 (5,100 people at that point) and non-COVID patients. According to Macron, the number of ICU beds will be increased to 10,000 to cope with the third wave.

ICU specialists have stated that the government's announcements are unrealistic. Djillali Annane, head of the resuscitation department at the Raymond-Poincaré Hospital in Garches, said, "It is not possible. There is confusion between resuscitation beds, around 5,000 in total, which are not increasing any more, and critical care beds, created in a temporary manner with room for maneuver, but probably not to the point of increasing to 10,000."

These temporary beds are obtained by cancelling other urgent care procedures, which is not sustainable in the long term. Staff are also exhausted by months of covid-related overload, has barely lessened since the second wave in late 2020.

Without a serious containment policy in place, the result has been a public health disaster. Professor Gilbert Debray, the head of the nephrology department at La Pitié-Salpêtrière, stated, "As a doctor, I cannot accept 12,000 deaths per month, hundreds of thousands of long-term COVID sufferers, which we do not talk about, an 80 percent postponement rate of other operations, and accept the risk of a new variant that will bring us back to square one."

He criticized Macron's policy, which is the same for the European Union as a whole. He notes that the countries that have adopted the "zero COVID" strategy "have won on the health, societal and economic fronts." A zero COVID strategy could have been put in place at the end of the first lockdown but was consciously rejected by Macron.

The corporate media is seizing on the slightest hint of improvement in the number of cases to encourage optimism and defend Macron's planned reopening timetable. With the Easter weekend, the statistics on the number of new infections during the week are contradictory and unreliable. While there has been some slowing down or stabilisation in some regions, the situation is worsening in others, such as in the Bouches-du-Rhône, and incidence levels remain very high in most areas.

Under conditions where daily case numbers remain higher than at the end of the second wave, the government's planned reopening of schools and the loosening of restrictions will only open the door to a fourth catastrophic wave of the virus.

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