

Indian variant surges in Britain as Tory government continues reopening drive

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Within days of the Conservative government authorising Monday's reopening of most of the economy, a catastrophe is threatened in Britain by the spread of the Indian mutation of the Covid virus.

After authorising the reopening last Friday, a major step to the complete reopening of the economy on June 21—including the end of all social distancing—the government faces a crisis, with talk that it may have to bring in more restrictions.

On Monday, Health Secretary Matt Hancock told Parliament that at least five cases of the Indian variant (B. 1.617.2) have already been identified in 86 local authorities. The mutation has taken seven lives so far in England.

By Tuesday, it was revealed that there were more than 2,300 cases of B. 1.617.2 in England alone, a quadrupling in just 10 days and a rise of 75 percent since last Thursday. The virus accounts for at least one in five coronavirus infections. Scientists are predicting that it will become the UK's dominant strain within days.

The reopening went ahead even after Public Health England upgraded, on May 6, B. 1.617.2 from a variant under investigation to a "variant of concern". According to scientific advice given to the government, it is up to 50 percent more transmissible than even the Kent strain which rapidly became dominant in Britain, much of Europe and the United States. B. 1.617.2 is now present in at least 30 countries.

Two areas of the north of England have reported the most cases. In Sefton on Merseyside (population 275,000) the variant makes up 90 percent of new cases, and in Bolton Greater Manchester (128,000), 86 percent. As of Tuesday, there were 24 Covid patients in Bolton Hospital, up from 13 two weeks ago.

In Bedford, a commuter town of nearly 107,000 in

south England, 80 cases have been recorded. Vicky Head, the town's director of public health, warned Monday of a "massive rise in cases". "About three or four weeks ago we were having three or four cases a day. We are now up to 10 times that." One of the "really striking things about the variant is just how transmissible it is. If someone goes to school and tests positive, we are then seeing their whole family test positive." At the Bedford Academy school, 50 Indian variant cases were reported over half term, resulting in 300 people self-isolating.

With the spread of B. 1.617.2, scientific advisers to the government felt it necessary to oppose significant parts of Monday's easing of restrictions. Much was made of Prime Minister Boris Johnson's statement last Friday that it was now safe for people to hug one another, but on Monday Professor Peter Openshaw of Imperial College London and a member of the New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (Nervtag) said, "This is a high-risk procedure, I would say in medical terms and I would certainly not be embracing people closely."

Jeremy Farrar, of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) said he opposed the government's policy of allowing people to gather indoors. He told the BBC's Today programme, "I think it is reasonable to just be sensible about knowing where transmission is occurring—mostly indoors... with lots of different people, different families, different communities, and I would just restrict that at the moment, personally."

These warnings have been ignored, with the BBC reporting Tuesday that over the weekend ministers were involved in discussions with SAGE at which, "The nuclear option of delaying indoor mixing, due to restart on 17 May, was discussed." This was rejected

outright by ministers.

To save the profits of the corporations, the government is authorising a homicidal opening of the economy, including allowing international travel, while at the same time having to advise against it!

Ministers have been churning out incessant propaganda about the success of its vaccine programme, including encouraging people to plan for holidays abroad this summer. Yet tens of millions of adults are still not fully vaccinated with the required two doses in the UK and the situation is worse still throughout Europe. Reality has intruded with Health Secretary Matt Hancock forced to advise this week that people should not travel for holidays to a list of “amber” countries where there remains a heavy circulation of coronavirus. This includes some of the main holiday destinations for Britons—Greece, Spain and France.

Yet according to the government’s roadmap, no-one is prohibited from visiting any amber country—leading to scenes of packed airports throughout Britain as 150 flights left Monday carrying tens of thousands to amber destinations. At Heathrow Airport, people leaving the UK for amber country holidays were standing in line for up to three hours, with social distancing impossible, alongside arrivals from India. India has been put on a “red” list with UK citizens not allowed to travel there, but people from India can travel to the UK provided they isolate in a government-approved hotel.

Johnson himself has made a number of statements over the last 24 hours explaining that the situation is still dangerous for the public but everything is being reopened anyway. He said on Sunday, “We have reached another milestone in our road map out of lockdown, but we must take this next step with a heavy dose of caution... I urge everyone to be cautious and take responsibility when enjoying new freedoms today in order to keep the virus at bay.”

Easing restrictions this week went ahead even as the British Medical Association warned Saturday, “It is a real worry that when further measures lift on 17 May, the majority of younger people, who are often highly socially mobile and could therefore be most at risk of a more infectious strain, are not yet vaccinated.”

A growing number of schools have reported outbreaks of Covid with the Indian variant responsible, including in Northampton where B. 1.617.2 and

another Indian variant, B.1.617.1, were found. On Tuesday, an outbreak of 17 Covid cases in one class was revealed in Manchester College’s Nicholls campus in the heavily populated Ardwick district. Despite the outbreak the college remains open. Nearly 1,500 students and staff are present. It is not yet confirmed whether the Indian variant is the cause of the outbreak. The college is located on the city’s Hyde Road and a busy bus route. Next door is a large depot of the Stagecoach bus company.

Johnson’s government is reviled the world over as one of the main proponents of the herd immunity policy adopted by the ruling elite that has led to more than 150,000 deaths in Britain and over 3.4 million internationally. But given how dangerous the Indian variant is, particularly for the unvaccinated, his government is not just repeating past crimes but preparing even greater levels of social murder.

Despite the surge of the Indian variant and the real possibility of another devastating wave of death, the government intends to do nothing but continue its reopening agenda, with a plan to carry out a final review on June 11 before all restrictions are lifted 10 days later.

The government is insisting that more data is required to make decisions on whether to restore restrictions or even consider local lockdowns in the most affected areas. Johnson said on Tuesday, “I don’t see anything conclusive at the moment to say that we need to deviate from the roadmap. We’ve got to be cautious and we are keeping everything under very close observation. We’ll know a lot more in a few days’ time.”



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