

South Korea records hundreds of new COVID-19 cases a day

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South Korea has gone through the first half of this year experiencing a sharp growth of COVID-19 cases, including more contagious and dangerous variants from countries like the United Kingdom. Daily new cases have averaged around 500 to 700 for the past several weeks. However, the South Korean government of President Moon Jae-in has responded to the surge in cases with half-measures in order to reduce the impact on big business.

As of Wednesday, there were a total of 137,682 cases in the country, including an additional 707 new cases from the previous day. Nearly 2,000 people have died from the virus, though the real number is likely far higher. The BMJ (*British Medical Journal*) reported this month that South Korea had 4,000 excess deaths in 2020, double the official death count from the virus.

Seoul has decided that these numbers are acceptable. Rather than implementing measures to contain the outbreak, the central government has instead utilized a 5-level scheme designed to appear to be enforcing social distancing while largely allowing businesses to stay open and keeping workplaces like auto factories and distribution centers up and running.

Even the limited measures currently in place have only been imposed in a reactive manner, with the government announcing new restrictions only after the COVID-19 virus had begun to spread. Currently, Seoul and the surrounding Gyeonggi-do Province are under Level 2 social distancing guidelines while the rest of the country is under Level 1.5. This includes a ban on gatherings of five or more people and a requirement for businesses like restaurants and bars to close by 10 p.m. Schools, which are a major source of transmission for the virus, remain open with students rotating between in-person and online classes.

Even this half-measure for schools is now set to be

scrapped. Seoul announced on May 12, that all schools would reopen to in-person classes without any online classes in September—the second half of the school year. This is before the government’s plan of achieving herd immunity by November through its vaccination program, meaning more students, teachers and their families will be put at risk.

Underscoring the danger, the very next day, health authorities reported that at least 331 students had caught COVID-19 in that past week, an increase of more than two students per day over the previous week. Many students also continue to attend after-school academies for subjects like mathematics, English, and music, in contact with others from different schools and risking a broader transmission of the virus.

Seoul’s disregard for public safety is despite the fact that the country has reported more than a thousand cases of the more contagious variants from Britain, South Africa, Brazil, and India. Over the past two weeks, the number of cases with unknown infection routes stood at 27.2 percent. Allowing daily new cases to stay in the hundreds without an effective response is inviting an even more explosive growth of the deadly virus.

Despite this, the ruling Democratic Party (DP) suggested on May 24 that restrictions could be further relaxed for those who have been vaccinated, including exemptions from quarantine, the ban on gatherings of more than five people, and allowing them to patronize restaurants after 10 p.m. The DP is also considering loosening the mandated nationwide wearing of masks, which was implemented shortly after the pandemic began last year and has played a large role in preventing even wider outbreaks.

These plans go against medical advice. There have been at least four “breakthrough” COVID cases of

people who have caught the virus despite being vaccinated. The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency has stated that even if fully vaccinated, people still need to wear masks. This is in line with epidemiologists in the US who have sharply criticized the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention there for lifting mask restrictions on vaccinated people as it is still unclear if vaccinated people can spread COVID.

Furthermore, while beginning in February, South Korea's vaccination program has largely been a failure, with only about 3.8 percent of the country's 52 million people fully vaccinated. At the current rate, only about 11 percent of the population will be fully vaccinated by the government's November deadline.

The Moon administration has instead acted to secure lucrative business deals for South Korean companies while aligning with Washington's anti-China campaign. During Moon's trip last week to Washington for a summit with President Joe Biden, Samsung Biologics signed a deal with Moderna to package the latter's COVID-19 vaccine in South Korea. The companies have not released details of the deal. South Korean companies already have similar deals for the AstraZeneca, Novavax, and Sputnik V vaccines.

Vice Health Minister Gang Do-tae stated, "Through the cooperation between South Korea and the United States, we can significantly increase the production and supply of COVID-19 vaccines, which will eventually ease the supply shortages around the globe." However, increased production for US companies will allow Washington to continue hoarding vaccines, deepening so-called vaccine nationalism, not easing it.

The anti-China perspective was on full display at the Biden-Moon summit, where the two leaders released a joint statement primarily targeting Beijing. The two called for "reforming" the World Health Organization (WHO), a jab at the body for failing to endorse Washington's campaign blaming China for the COVID-19 pandemic.

Their statement went on to say, "We will also support a transparent and independent evaluation and analysis of the origins of the COVID-19 outbreak and for investigating outbreaks of unknown origin in the future."

This seemingly innocuous phrase is in fact another attack on China. While the WHO has ruled out the

possibility of COVID-19 being released from a lab, first Donald Trump and now the Biden administration have propagated the lie that Beijing is responsible for unleashing the virus, whether on purpose or through an accident.

The US-South Korea "vaccine alliance," as Moon called it, is nothing more than the continuation of the US anti-China campaign and drive to war, not a genuine effort to eradicate COVID-19 or protect the global population.



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