

Governments abandon COVID-19 restrictions as Delta variant surges worldwide

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Around the world, epidemiologists and public health experts are ringing the alarm about the spread of the Delta variant of COVID-19, which is up to 60 percent more transmissible than the previously dominant variant and has shown indications of being partially resistant to some vaccines.

The “Delta variant is faster, it is fitter, it will pick off the more vulnerable more efficiently than previous variants,” warned Dr. Michael Ryan at a World Health Organization press briefing Monday. Jennifer Surtees, co-director of the University of Buffalo’s genome research hub, told the *Financial Times*, “The variant could really get transmitted like wildfire.”

The Delta variant, first detected in India, is responsible for a resurgence of the pandemic in the UK, where the number of daily new COVID-19 cases has grown five-fold over the past six weeks. The variant is also behind a sharp rise of cases and deaths in Portugal and Russia. On Tuesday, Russia recorded its highest daily death toll from the pandemic since early February. Other countries in Europe and Southeast Asia are also seeing a rise in cases due to the new variant.

Other parts of the world, particularly in Africa and Latin America, are seeing a sharp rise in cases even before the more transmissible variant has been widely detected. In South Africa, daily new cases are again over 11,000 and are approaching the previous peak of 19,000 reached in early January. In Brazil, where more than 500,000 people have died, new cases are at near record levels, at close to 75,000 a day.

The variant also threatens to drive a new surge of the pandemic in the US, which continues to record 12,000 new cases every day and more than 300 deaths. Only 45.8 percent of the US population is fully vaccinated, but in some states the vaccination rate is less than 35 percent.

In an ominous warning, epidemiologist Eric Feigl-Ding predicted that the Delta variant “will become [the]

dominant #COVID19 strain within weeks” in the United States. He noted data from the *Financial Times* indicating that close to one-third of US cases are caused by the Delta variant, meaning that the share of cases attributable to the variant may have “doubled/tripled in 1 week!”

In Arkansas, where vaccination rates are lowest in the United States, the Delta variant now accounts for 56 percent of all sequenced cases, according to the data presented by the *Financial Times*. The newspaper added that the variant is “estimated to account for 49 percent of new cases in Utah and 42 percent in Missouri,” which also have below-average vaccination rates.

Despite the danger posed by the new variant, states throughout the US are accelerating the removal of all restraints on the spread of the pandemic.

On Tuesday, Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer stood on the beach at Detroit’s Belle Isle park and declared that the state was ending all restrictions to stop the spread of COVID-19.

“This is an exciting announcement that we are now dropping the epi[demic] orders,” Whitmer said. “Effective today, there is no more mask or gathering order. Effective today, there are no more capacity limits, indoors or outdoors. Effective today, our pure Michigan summer is back.”

Michigan’s announcement of the end of mask mandates and social distancing—together with similar announcements by New York and California—is part of a nationwide and global move by governments to end all measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 ahead of what scientists warn will be a massive resurgence of the disease.

Throughout Europe, governments are likewise eliminating restrictions on the spread of COVID-19, even as health officials warn that ending them will result in a new wave of cases.

Denmark is ending restrictions despite an increase in

cases caused by the Delta variant and has dropped mask requirements in indoor settings. And last week the European Union dropped restrictions on non-essential travel from 14 countries, including the US, effectively allowing unrestricted tourist travel.

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control warned that the abandonment of measures to stop the spread of the pandemic could lead to a resurgence of cases on the scale of last year's increase, despite the availability of vaccination. It declared:

Modeling scenarios indicate that any relaxation over the summer months of the stringency of nonpharmaceutical measures... could lead to a fast and significant increase in daily cases in all age groups, with an associated increase in hospitalizations and deaths, potentially reaching the same levels of the autumn of 2020 if no additional measures are taken.

This is an extraordinary warning. Despite the availability of vaccines, death rates could again reach the levels seen last fall as a predictable result of the policies being carried out by governments around the world.

The Biden administration, meanwhile, is intransigent in its demands for the reopening of in-person instruction at K-12 schools. On Wednesday, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Rochelle Walensky told NBC that notwithstanding the rapid spread of the Delta variant, there would be no change in the administration's plan to ensure the full reopening of schools. This is despite overwhelming evidence that the Delta variant disproportionately affects children.

Throughout the United States almost all masking and social distancing requirements have been eliminated since the CDC advised the abandonment of mandatory masking mandates. In response to the CDC's announcement, workplace after workplace is dropping restrictions. The automaker Stellantis announced last week that it was abandoning temperature checks and other social distancing measures.

Meanwhile, as the *Wall Street Journal* reported earlier this month, "A growing number of states are slowing the pace of their reports on key pandemic data, including cases, deaths and hospitalizations."

Nearly 4 million people have died from the coronavirus pandemic over the past year and a half. According to

vastly undercounted official figures, daily new cases are at over 360,000 and daily deaths at nearly 8,000. In the United States alone, more than 600,000 people have died, based on official reports, though estimates of the true death toll rise to nearly one million.

As has been the case throughout the pandemic, policy is driven by the demands of the financial oligarchy for the removal of all obstacles to profit-making and providing an uninterrupted supply of labor for capitalist exploitation. As a result of the policy of subordinating human lives to private profit, one million new millionaires have been created in the US over the past year, according to a recent report by Credit Suisse.

Workers must reject the ruling class campaign to abandon measures to contain the pandemic, the aim of which is the "normalization" of mass death to facilitate the enrichment of the financial oligarchy. With the spread of the Delta variant, it is all the more urgent for workers to oppose the abandonment of social distancing and mask wearing and the ongoing dismantling of the health care infrastructure for tracking and isolating COVID-19 cases.

The spread of the Delta variant demonstrates once again that the pandemic is a global crisis that requires a global response. Only 10 percent of the world's population is fully vaccinated. In low-income countries, less than one percent of the population has even received one dose of the vaccine. The continued spread of the virus globally raises the danger of the further development of new variants that will inevitably infect other countries, sparking new outbreaks.

The inability of governments to contain the pandemic reflects the fundamental social dynamic of capitalism—the subordination of policy to the interests of the ruling class and national conflict. It is this social order that bears responsibility for the massive toll of the pandemic, which in the final analysis expresses the incompatibility of the needs of society with the profit system.



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