

“If we want to spread the delta variant around Europe, this is the way to go.”

# Euro 2020 football cup linked to thousands of COVID-19 cases as delta variant sweeps Europe

Samuel Tissot  
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The delayed 2020 UEFA (Union of European Football Associations) Football Championship (Euro 2020) began a year late on June 11 and is now at the semi-final stage. While in previous Euro cups one nation has hosted the competition, Euro 2020 has seen 24 national teams play in 11 different cities across Europe, from Seville to Baku.

Tournament matches have been attended by over 800,000 fans despite the resurgence of COVID-19. Many of those in attendance travelled hundreds or thousands of miles to watch their team play.

Next week’s semi-final and final matches are due to be attended by over 60,000 fans each at London’s Wembley stadium, though Britain is deep into a third wave of coronavirus driven by the more deadly and more infectious delta variant.

England’s Round of 16 victory against Germany at Wembley Stadium, attended by more than 40,000 fans, led to wild celebrations of thousands of closely-packed home fans shouting and singing arm-in-arm despite the “official” implementation of social distancing within stadiums. The government pushed forward with the large attendance at matches, and the media promoted celebrations violating social distancing measures as part of the ruling class’ effort to promote a “back to normal” attitude.

Britain’s Conservative government also hopes to use the strong performance of the England team, which will play a semi-final against Denmark at Wembley Stadium on Wednesday. The intent is to raise nationalist fervour and distract from the government’s deadly herd immunity policy that has led to over 152,000 deaths where a death

certificate mentions COVID-19 as one of the causes. On Saturday, Prime Minister Boris Johnson stood on a massive English flag draped across Downing Street to declare his support for the team before its quarter-final against Ukraine that evening.

On Saturday, the UK had a seven-day average of 23,115 cases, up from 13,835 a week earlier. According to the British Medical Association, COVID-19 hospitalizations in Britain have risen 55 percent over this period. On June 30, the UK saw 331 new hospitalizations from COVID-19, the most since March 18. The spread of the delta variant in Britain is a warning for what is to come on the European continent, which has an even lower vaccination rate.

London is using its higher vaccination rate compared to other European countries to give a false, anti-scientific rationalization of its herd immunity policy. New Health Secretary Sajid Javid, who aims to prematurely end all social distancing restrictions on July 19, repeated the murderous mantra of French President Emmanuel Macron, asserting in an op-ed for the *Mail on Sunday*, that the British population must “learn to live with COVID.”

The resurgence of the virus in Europe, driven in no small part by the Euro 2020 cup, threatens a catastrophe on a largely unvaccinated population. Only 39.7 percent of the European Union’s (EU) population have received two doses. In the wider European area, including Russia and other non-EU countries, many of which played in Euro 2020, only 24 percent are vaccinated, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Half of elders in the continent remain unprotected as well as around 40

percent of health care workers.

On Thursday, WHO regional director for Europe, Dr Hans Henri Kluge, warned: “By August, the WHO European Region will be ‘delta dominant’; but by August, the Region will not be fully vaccinated (63 percent of people are still waiting for their first jab); and in August, the WHO European Region will still be mostly restriction-free, with increasing travels and gatherings.”

Kluge added, “The three conditions for a new wave of excess hospitalizations and deaths before the autumn are therefore in place: new variants, deficit in vaccine uptake, increased social mixing.” After a 10-week decline in cases across Europe, Kluge revealed that the number of cases rose 10 percent last week.

Asked by a reporter whether Euro 2020 games were acting as “super-spreader” events, Kluge cautiously responded: “I hope not ... but this can’t be excluded.”

In fact, it is already clear that stadiums have been major vectors for the spread of the virus:

\*Public Health Scotland said that there had been 1,300 cases among Scottish fans who travelled to London for Scotland’s game against England.

\*Finnish health authorities reported nearly 100 confirmed cases among fans who travelled to St. Petersburg—which saw 115 COVID-19 deaths on July 1—for Finland’s game against Russia.

\*Danish authorities are currently trying to track down 4,000 contact cases after three fans tested positive for the delta variant after a match in Copenhagen.

The English, Swedish, Spanish, Scottish and Slovakian national football teams all have reported cases either in preparation for, or during, the tournament.

While stadiums are a major concern, these are not the only places that infections linked to Euro 2020 occur. Senior Emergency Officer for WHO Europe Catherine Smallwood raised concerns about travel to the stadium, asking, “How are people getting there? Are they travelling in large-crowded convoys of buses? Are they taking individual measures when they are doing that?” Infection rates have also been driven by large groups of fans congregating at bars, “fan zones” and private residences to watch games.

Speaking to AFP, Antoine Flahault, the director of the Institute of Global Health at the University of Geneva, said of the tournament, “if we want to spread the Delta variant around Europe then this is the way to go.”

As infections accelerate, sections of the ruling class are distancing themselves from the decision to press ahead with the tournament with tens of thousands of fans

attending. In a joint press conference with Johnson, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said she was “very concerned” that 60,000 fans in Wembley “might be a bit too much.”

This came after Merkel’s interior minister, Horst Seehofer, called UEFA’s decision to host 42,000 fans at the June 29 Germany-England match “absolutely irresponsible,” adding: “I have the suspicion this is about commerce again.”

Merkel and Seehofer are cynically trying to distance themselves from Johnson’s brazen “herd immunity” policy, though they pursued this same deadly policy in all but name—forcing a premature reopening of schools and businesses in Germany that led to 91,032 deaths.

UEFA’s decision to go ahead with Euro 2020 was, however, undoubtedly determined by the profit interests of Europe’s multi-billion-dollar media and sporting conglomerates. According to insideworldfootball.com, revenue from Euro 2020 is expected to exceed €2.5 billion. At Euro 2016, UEFA made €847 million in profits from a smaller revenue of €1.92 billion. While figures from ticket sales are currently unavailable for Euro 2020, Euro 2016, held in France, raised €269 million from attending fans.

Similar financial calculations were behind the decision to play the Copa América football tournament, which ran at the same time as Euro 2020, in Brazil. Brazil’s fascist President Jair Bolsonaro justified the deadly decision to host the tournament by stating, “I regret the deaths, but we have to live.”

Brazil has averaged 1,500 daily deaths throughout the tournament and now has an official tally of over 523,000 COVID-19 related deaths.

The decision taken by UEFA to push ahead with Euro 2020, without the necessary safety measures in the face of a mass resurgence of the virus, exposes the financial aristocracy’s contempt for the lives of millions of European football fans. The full support capitalist governments across Europe have given the tournament underscores their determination to allow the virus to continue spreading unchecked in the population.



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