

Scotland leads Europe in coronavirus transmission

Stephen Alexander
9 July 2021

Scotland is facing a deepening public health disaster as the Delta variant surges, resulting in record daily infections and a resurgence of hospitalisation and deaths. The country accounts for four of Europe's top 10 COVID-19 hotspots in the last 14 days according to the World Health Organization (WHO), with the UK as whole accounting for seven regions. The other regions in the top 10 are in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Cyprus.

Tayside in northeast Scotland has the highest infection rate in Europe, with 1,223 new cases per 100,000 people recorded over the 14-day up to the July 7. Lothian, home to Scotland's capital, Edinburgh, currently registers third with 1,083 cases per 100,000 behind North-East England. Greater Glasgow and Clyde had the fifth highest rate of cases with 899 per 100,000. The Scottish health boards of Fife and Lanarkshire also feature in the top 10 together with North-West England.

The true infection rate is already far greater as Scotland's overwhelmed Test and Protect system is only picking up approximately half of all cases and contact tracing is experiencing widespread delays beyond the WHO guidance of 72-hours for informing the contacts of positive cases. According to the ZOE COVID Symptom Study app, 1 in 83 of all people in Scotland have COVID-19 against 1 in 159 across the UK. Scotland registered a record daily surge of 4,234 cases on Thursday July 1, although the recent totals have subsequently fallen to around 3,000.

While the vaccine has successfully reduced the rate of hospitalisation, serious illness and death, only 64 percent of adults have been fully vaccinated in Scotland. The Delta variant, which capitalist governments have criminally allowed to spread globally, is far more transmissible and deadly than the

original variants of coronavirus. Vaccine efficacy has been reduced considerably by the mutation, leaving the health and lives of millions at risk even among the vaccinated.

Hospitalisations due to coronavirus still take place at the considerable rate of 5 percent of all cases, compared to rate of 10 percent in the second wave. The latest figures show that 401 Scots are now in hospital with the virus, up 41 since Monday, with 38 people in intensive care.

At National Health Service (NHS) Tayside, where admissions doubled recently in the space of 24 hours to 36, operational medical director Dr Pamela Johnston warned, "We currently have 36 patients in hospital requiring care for Covid, with some of those requiring more intensive care in our ICU and HDU... many of these patients are under the age of 40 and we expect this number to increase over the next few weeks.

"Our GP colleagues at the Covid assessment centre in Dundee are also very busy, seeing five times as many people as last month", she added, "These are people of all ages who are feeling very unwell with the virus and coming for assessment."

The strain on the health service is already overwhelming several NHS hospitals. Raigmore Hospital in Inverness, the largest in the Highlands, has been placed on "code black status" after reaching full capacity, as have Aberdeen Royal Infirmary and Dr Gray's Hospital in Elgin at NHS Grampian.

The head of the British Medical Association Scotland, Lewis Morrison, told BBC Radio Scotland, "Raigmore is an example of what might well happen in other places if we don't take some action to deal with what is a very high level of pressure on healthcare, both in general practice and in hospitals, combined with rising Covid cases leading to a large number of staff

having to self-isolate.”

Cancellations to non-urgent surgery and outpatient services are already widespread. NHS Lanarkshire has reduced elective procedures after 700 people were admitted with the virus across three hospitals over the last weekend. Additional surge wards are being set up at hospitals across the country, including at NHS Fife and NHS Tayside. Tayside now has 60 dedicated beds for COVID-19 patients.

Hospital-acquired COVID-19, which has killed 1,600 Scots since the onset of the pandemic, is also again on the rise. University Hospital Hairmyres, in East Kilbride, South Lanarkshire, was placed on high-alert Monday after an outbreak in Ward 15, which has been closed to new admissions and visitors. This is under conditions where hospitals face a spike in demand for emergency surgery and medical attention due to the huge backlog built up over the pandemic, which includes a quarter of a million operations.

Around 70 percent of patients hospitalised with coronavirus had not made a full recovery at their five month follow up appointment, the Post-Hospitalisation COVID-19 Study found. With record cases, already dangerously overstretched GP surgeries and outpatient services are threatened with an avalanche of cases of Long COVID, to which children are also susceptible.

According to weekly data published by National Records of Scotland, coronavirus related deaths have also begun to climb, albeit from a low level. There were 21 COVID-19 related deaths in Scotland over the week ending July 4, up from 17 deaths recorded in the previous week. Of these, 15 died in hospital, 4 in care homes, and 2 in private residences or non-institutional settings. The majority of fatalities (11) were among people aged 75 or over, with 6 deaths between the ages of 65 and 74, and four deaths among the under 65s.

In total there have now been 10,189 deaths where COVID-19 is mentioned on the death certificate, amounting to nearly 2 deaths per 1,000 of Scotland's 5.5 million population.

The devolved Scottish National Party (SNP) government projects that hospitalisations will reach 1,000 by mid-July, yet it is moving forward with the full reopening of the economy in line with the demands of all sectors of business. Scotland's Finance Secretary Kate Forbes conceded that the pandemic is at a “fragile moment” but reiterated the government's intention to

remove all restrictions by August 9, just a few weeks after Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government is scheduled to end restrictions in England.

The Scottish government has dishonestly presented its approach to ending lockdown restrictions as more cautious and scientific than the Conservative government's in London. In truth, it has adopted the murderous “herd immunity” strategy of mass infection and death pioneered by Johnson as its own. It piloted many of Westminster's socially criminal “public health” measures in Scotland, including the unsafe reopening of schools and universities weeks in advance of England, with in-person education a major transmission vector in the second and third waves. The SNP is again seeking to disguise its collaboration in social murder with cosmetic timing differences in the relaxation of lockdown restrictions.

In line with this, Professor Jason Leitch, the Scottish government's National Clinical Director, parroted the murderous logic of capitalist governments the world over which have justified a bonfire of public health restriction prior to full vaccination as necessary to save the economy, i.e., the profits of big business and the wealth of the super-rich. Speaking to the media this week, Leitch stated, “Of course, when you open there is more risk to the population, but you have to balance that with economic harms and social harms.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact