

Wave of COVID-19 Delta variant in Europe spirals out of control

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The Delta variant is driving a surge of COVID-19 cases across Europe. Reuters reports that in the last two weeks, 42 of Europe's 47 countries have seen a rise in cases.

In the last seven days, Worldometers.info recorded an increase of 81 percent in France's weekly cases to 35,059, Greece's 97 percent to 16,758, Italy's 75 percent to 10,135, Spain's 61 percent to 143,478, Belgium's 103 percent to 9,227, the UK's 28 percent to 243,392 and the Netherlands 411 percent increase to 58,646. Except for the UK (52 percent fully vaccinated), these countries have less than 50 percent of their population vaccinated.

Despite months of warnings from epidemiologists across the continent, capitalist governments in every European country are ending the last of their limited measures to tackle the virus, facilitating a rapid rise of the more deadly and more infectious Delta variant.

Even though the rapid increase in the virus has only just begun, deaths throughout the continent are also on the rise. Europe recorded a 3 percent increase in the last seven days, the first week-on-week increase since mid-April. The UK, where all restrictions will be lifted on July 19, has seen a 42 percent increase in weekly deaths. Epidemiologist Neil Ferguson stated that the UK could reach 200 daily deaths by the end of the summer. Portugal also recorded 56 deaths last week, an 87 percent increase on the previous week.

Britain's Tory government is returning to a more explicit herd immunity policy. It calls for building immunity by infection among non-vaccinated children and adults—a policy denounced as one of “moral emptiness” and “epidemiological stupidity” by WHO Emergencies Programme Director Mike Ryan.

The impact of this herd immunity policy will not just be limited to a rapid increase in deaths in the coming

weeks and months. An open letter to *The Lancet* denouncing the murderous policy of the UK government, now signed by over 1,200 scientists, warned of “a generation left with chronic health problems and disability.”

The British government's criminal actions must be taken as a warning to the European working class as a whole. On the continent vaccination is far less widespread, with just 32.8 percent of the population having had two doses. Facing this new wave, bourgeois governments across the continent are pursuing an identical policy of immunity by infection of those who are not vaccinated, including tens of millions of school-aged children.

Russia, with a vaccination rate of just 13.2 percent, is in its deadliest period since the pandemic began. Last week, 5,237 people died there, over 80 percent of the continent's weekly total. Tuesday (780), Wednesday (786) and Thursday (791) saw successive records set in the country for the highest daily COVID-19 death toll. This disaster threatens to spread to other countries in Eastern Europe which have similar levels of vaccination.

Typifying the attitude of the ruling elites across the continent, at the beginning of July, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov stated, “Nobody wants any lockdowns, and yes, it is not up for debate. It is not being discussed.”

In order to avoid measures that will damage the profit interests of the capitalist class, European governments are responding to the rise by promoting the anti-scientific lie that vaccines alone are sufficient to tackle COVID-19. French President Emmanuel Macron tweeted on Monday, “The vaccination of all the French is the only way back to normal life.”

Since the development of life-saving vaccines,

scientists have repeatedly stressed that they are not a one-stop solution to the pandemic. They must be paired with social distancing and other measures to eliminate the virus. Furthermore, the spread of infection whilst large percentages of the population are partially protected by a single dose threatens to accelerate the rate at which variants can develop more substantial resistance to the vaccines, posing an even greater threat to the European and world population.

The adoption of anti-scientific rules that effectively suspend restrictions on leisure and tourism for those who are fully vaccinated has already undoubtedly driven infections. In France, since July 9, fully-vaccinated people have been able to attend nightclubs. Nightclubs have also been opened in many parts of Spain.

In another telling episode, which exposes the acute risk facing all of Europe, on June 26 the Netherlands opened its nightclubs for those with negative tests, leading to claims that test results were fake or that QR codes were not properly checked by staff.

Following this reopening the seven-day average for cases in July has risen from 607 on July 1 to 8,376 on July 14, a 1,379 percent rise. Popular outrage led Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte to apologize for an “error in judgment” and reintroduce restrictions on nightclubs. However, with over 10,000 cases on Wednesday and workplaces, schools and restaurants all open, conditions are ripe for a continued increase in infections, inevitably followed by hospitalizations and deaths.

Increased tourism in Europe is also spreading the virus. Since the end of spring, double-vaccinated holidaymakers have been allowed to travel freely even though full vaccination does not prevent transmission. In Malta, which recorded an incredible 1,084 percent increase in weekly cases, to 912 last week, the Deputy Prime Minister Chris Fearne told tourists, “If you are vaccinated, come to Malta.”

This surge is particularly striking given that Malta has the highest rate of vaccination in Europe: 79.3 percent of its population are fully vaccinated.

María Aránzazu González Laya, the Spanish minister of foreign affairs for the big-business PSOE, told tourists, “This is a time for prudence, not for panicking. There is no reason at the moment to ask people to cancel their vacations.” This is an absurd lie: on July

13, Spain recorded 43,960 cases according to *Worldometer.info*, its highest number since the pandemic began. Currently 600 COVID-19 patients under 30 are in intensive care in the country.

The pandemic in Europe is at a crucial juncture. After weeks of decreasing infections and deaths, the deadlier Delta variant is now ripping through the continent at a gathering pace. Yet capitalist governments are once again refusing to take scientific measures to save lives and are ready to sacrifice hundreds of thousands more people at the altar of corporate profit.

The question of containing and eliminating the virus is above all political. Scientific measures were enforced to limit the spread of the pandemic only in March 2020, after a wave of wildcat strikes began in Italy and spread throughout Europe and the world. Following the reopening in May 2020, however, corporatist unions across Europe have worked with governments to suppress working class opposition to a herd immunity policy.

It is for this reason that the International Committee of the Fourth International and its European parties are forming a global network of independent rank-and-file safety committees that, guided by scientists and medical professionals, must shut down unsafe workplaces. These committees will lead the fight for full pay for workers required to stay at home, effective test-and-trace systems, ventilation and other essential workplace safety measures, and a swift and equitable roll-out of vaccines. These life-saving measures must be paid for out of the obscene wealth of the billionaire oligarchy, which has added over \$1 trillion to its wealth since the beginning of the pandemic in Europe alone.



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