

Covid cases and deaths surge in UK, fuelled by reopening of schools

Robert Stevens
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The terrible societal cost of the Johnson government's herd immunity policy is clearer by the day. After 156,000 Covid fatalities and millions of infections, all indices point to a substantial increase in cases, hospitalisations and deaths.

Britain is recording over 33,000 new cases daily, with the 233,594 over the last seven days an increase on the previous week's 228,938. The UK's current rate of 3,420 cases per million people is higher than those of the United States, Japan, Russia, Turkey, Thailand, France and Iran.

Deaths are on the increase, with 115 a day on average, up 15 percent on the previous week. On Tuesday, following the bank holiday weekend, another 32,000 cases and 50 deaths were reported. Hospital admissions are increasing and are approaching 1,000 a day.

The government's mantra of "learning to live with the virus" is a recipe for mass infection and death. The herd immunity agenda was aired again last week when Downing Street let it be known that there would be at least a further 30,000 deaths in the UK over the next year. Prime Minister Boris Johnson would "only consider imposing further [Covid-19 safety] restrictions if that figure looked like it could rise above 50,000."

Such an outcome, and worse, is more than possible. Cases are surging across the country, fuelled by the highly transmissible Delta variant that has spread like wildfire since the end of all lockdown measures on July 19.

In England, the UK's most populous country, the virus is spreading out of control. Sunday's *Observer* newspaper reported figures from the Office for National Statistics which estimated that in the week ending August 20, 756,900 people in England—one person in 70—were infected with Covid-19. It cited the comments of Simon Clarke, associate professor in cellular microbiology at Reading University, who noted, "community infections are 26 times more common now than they were a year ago, when the population was unvaccinated and the country was three months into its reopening."

Not a single area in the UK has avoided being hit. Every area nationwide is recording more than 100 infections per

100,000 people, with locations in Scotland and Northern Ireland leading the way.

The *Daily Mail* reported, "All 10 of the highest Covid infection rates in the past week were in local authorities in Northern Ireland and the Scottish central belt." With the resurgence of Covid fuelled by an explosion of cases among young people, it is no surprise that Scotland and Northern Ireland are now the worst-affected areas as schoolchildren and teachers have been back in classrooms for weeks.

In Scotland, the first schools opened as early as August 11, and in Northern Ireland shortly after. On Tuesday and Wednesday, all schools fully reopened in Northern Ireland to another 350,000 children. Hardly any safety measures are in place, with only post-primary pupils in Northern Ireland required to wear masks in class, and only until October 8. Pupils will not have to self-isolate after coming into contact with a coronavirus case if they have tested positive for the virus themselves within the previous 90 days.

On Tuesday, Michelle O'Neill, Northern Ireland's deputy first minister and Sinn Féin Vice President, had to self-isolate after contracting Covid.

In Scotland, the situation is, if anything, even worse, with a new record number of daily cases reported four times in the last week. On Tuesday another 6,029 new cases and seven deaths were recorded.

In England and Wales, schools reopened this week, also with next to no virus mitigation measures in place. Schools will only have to provide pupils in Year 7 and above with two, widely discredited, lateral flow tests at the start of term. The *Daily Mail* noted that "When 8.9 million children in England went back last September it led to Covid cases spiking four-fold in a month." But that was under conditions in which the Delta variant—far more transmissible than the original wild version of Covid—had not become dominant in the population.

As mass infection proceeds, a grave danger is that variants even more devastating than Delta are allowed to develop. According to the *i* newspaper, a new strain of Delta may have emerged from one of the super-spreader events

encouraged by the government last month. 53,000 people were allowed to be packed into the Boardmasters festival in Newquay, England, contributing to a surge in infections and the area now having the most Covid cases in England with more than 2,000 per 100,000 people.

The *i* reported that hospital staff in Devon and Cornwall now refer to the “festival variant”. It is one of around twelve different strains of Delta already discovered.

With no end in sight to the carnage being wrought by the cabal of herd immunity enthusiasts in Downing Street, hostility to the Johnson government is growing. On Monday, #JohnsonOut was the most popular hashtag on Twitter, with nearly 90,000 tweets posted in 24 hours. Many focused on the mass death sanctioned by the government over the last 18 months and the stepping up of attacks on the working class.

The tweets give an accurate picture of the sentiment held by millions. Among the comments were those responding to a short video posted by parent Lisa Diaz. Lisa has posted a number of videos in recent days—focussing on the unsafe return to schools—which have received a large viewership. Monday’s video, accompanied by the #JohnsonOut hashtag was titled, “The British people deserve so much better” was a powerful statement denouncing the criminal policy of Johnson. By Tuesday it had been viewed by more than 131,000 people and retweeted over 1,500 times.

On August 22, Lisa participated in the online meeting, hosted by the WSWs, “For a Global Strategy to Stop the Pandemic and Save Lives”.

Other tweets read:

- “I’m appalled at this Conservatives Gov. They happily left people to die & struggle whilst lining the pockets of their mates. 3.8m taxpayers were left without any financial support during Covid-19 through no fault of their own with 26 known suicides.”

- #JohnsonOut. Not sending my youngest back to school because this bastard government wants to deliberately infect our children with covid, even though there is no herd immunity, only more variants, more deaths, more hospitalizations and cases way out of control!

- “One more day left of August... schools going back soon with mitigations removed. Covid rates far, far higher than this time last year. The government are happy to let the ‘bodies pile high’. We need #JohnsonOut”

- “We are just monetary figures to the Tories: ‘The Government’s cost-benefit analysis on Covid measures is believed to set not only the acceptable level of cost to save the life of a Covid patient at up to £30,000, but also how much each life lost costs the UK economy. #JohnsonOut’

- “We have no public health Covid measures in place in England and cases are rising. Schools are due to open. We

don’t even have to isolate now if we have been in contact with a positive case! And vaccine efficacy is waning. A total disaster is looming. #JohnsonOut”

A number of people also denounced the comments of Education Secretary Gavin Williamson who said in a column in Monday’s *Mail* —after describing the mass return of millions of children and educators to schools as a “happy position” to be in—that “Parents too have a responsibility to make sure that their children are tested regularly.”

One response read, “Parents have a responsibility to help prevent 4th wave of Covid-19 when schools reopen next week—Williamson. As a teacher this makes me f’ing angry. Almost all mitigation requirements scrapped. He & Gov’t solely responsible for what’s going to happen. #JohnsonOut”

Amid the worsening pandemic, in the name of “protecting the economy”, the Tories are escalating their assault on the working class. Johnson confirmed this week that millions of the poorest people who have relied since the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis on a £20 weekly uplift in their Universal Credit welfare payment will lose it from October. At the same time, the furlough scheme, under which the government paid a percentage of the wages of a large proportion of those unable to work during the pandemic, will end.

The widespread hatred of the government currently finds no organised expression as its policies are supported by the Labour Party and the trade unions, who backed to the hilt the July 19 reopening and the return to schools. Opposition can only be mounted through the mobilisation of the working class, independently of the Labour and union bureaucracy, on a socialist programme for the eradication of the Covid-19 virus.



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