

Summer ends with 4,000 COVID-19 deaths in Spain as schools reopen

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This summer, there have been 4,000 COVID-19 deaths in Spain, with 2,800 in August alone. These horrific figures are the result of the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE)–Podemos government’s ending of all social distancing before the summer.

Much of the recent wave has been triggered by the reopening of bars and nightclubs in Spain. Youth were encouraged to return to these venues under the false pretext that they are safe and that there is a low chance of a new surge of the virus. Minimal social distancing measures—masking, curfews, limiting the number of people who could meet, and the banning of potential super-spreader events like concerts or music festivals—were junked to reopen the economy, especially for tourism.

The PSOE–Podemos government let the virus spread massively: this summer ended with more than 1.1 million infections in Spain. However, it covered its policy with claims that vaccination, now reaching 70 percent of the population, will by itself halt infections. In fact, despite this vaccination rate, there are still more than 130 deaths and nearly 10,000 infections each day. Another 600 to 700 deaths are expected this week.

Spain’s 14-day incidence rate of COVID-19 stands at 210 per 100,000 inhabitants, well over the 150 per 100,000 Spanish authorities call “high risk.” All Spain’s major urban areas are over 150; provinces like A Coruña, Álava, Badajoz, Bizkaia, Cáceres, Toledo and Seville are over 250.

These numbers will only mount as students return to schools, where incidence rates have skyrocketed. Among adolescents aged 12 to 19, the incidence is 400 per 100,000 inhabitants. In this age group, only about one-third (32.2 percent) are fully vaccinated.

On Monday, schools in Madrid, Cantabria and Melilla started. In coming weeks, more regions will follow. In total, 8.2 million children will return to school to face a

virus that has claimed more than 1.1 million lives across Europe since last year.

Last Wednesday, Education Minister Pilar Alegría demanded “maximum presence” in schools. Calling vaccinations an “effective tool,” she insisted the new school year “will not resemble the previous one at all. First of all, because of the experience we have acquired.”

In reality, infections are mounting. According to the Instituto de Salud Carlos III, in the three weeks from July 26 to August 15, 82,587 children and adolescents aged between 5 and 19 were infected.

The PSOE–Podemos government’s reckless reopening of schools consciously ignores what is happening outside Spain’s borders. In America, more than 500,000 children tested positive for COVID-19 from August 5 to 26, according to state data collected by the American Academy of Pediatrics. At least 203,962 of those cases were reported in the week of August 19-26 after schools were reopened. At the end of June, a reported weekly figure was just under 8,500.

In Britain, the week to August 28, there were more than 300 COVID cases per 100,000 among 5- to 15-year-olds. In neighbouring France, Pasteur Institute estimates that in France alone, there could be 50,000 infections of children each day by late September.

The PSOE–Podemos government, however, is covering itself with claims of the alleged success of its school reopening policy last year. According to the Ministry of Health, last school year closed with 6,631 outbreaks that affected some 37,500 students.

As the government authorities know, this was before the Delta variant became predominant. Its spread will be facilitated by the PSOE–Podemos government’s decision to slash minimal social distancing measures that existed last school year. While masks will remain compulsory for all children above age 6, social distancing, nominally still maintained, has been reduced to only 1.2 metres.

Moreover, teacher-to-student ratios have returned to pre-pandemic levels, with a deficit of 17,000 teachers according to the Central Sindical Independiente y de Funcionarios (CSIF) union.

The virus especially threatens 8 million people who have not yet received the full vaccination schedule. To these are added 6 million children under 12.

As the WWSWS has insisted, vaccination alone will not stop the pandemic. Claims to the contrary ignore the character of the Delta variant, which is scientifically proven to be too transmissible and capable of infecting vaccinated individuals for vaccinations alone to halt the pandemic.

The World Health Organisation has warned that it expects 236,000 deaths in Europe this autumn. If proven scientific policies are adopted to stop the transmission of COVID-19 and eradicate the virus, however, these deaths and the related tens of millions of infections can be stopped.

Yet scientific policies face determined opposition across the entire European political establishment, who place corporate profits and the wealth of the super-rich above workers' lives. To save lives, workers must clearly understand the necessity to fight for an independent, scientifically grounded policy to eradicate the virus. This can only be carried against the capitalist system and its political accomplices.

In Spain, this means above all a struggle against the staggering indifference to human life of the "left populist" Podemos party. Having promised radical change and an end to austerity, Podemos has become the PSOE's chief co-conspirator in the ruling elite's pandemic policy. It has covered for the government's claims to have finished with the virus, arguing that in-person schooling is safe and covering for the austerity measures linked to the EU bailout fund.

Spain's trade unions have played a key role in letting the PSOE-Podemos enforce these measures. They have all defended the false line that returning to schools and reopening of factories and offices are safe, if only some limited measures are taken, like wearing masks.

Just days before schools re-opened, the Stalinist Workers Commissions (CCOO) union called on the government to contract 40,000 teachers and cut class sizes to 20. The CCOO did not call any protests, let alone strikes to enforce this demand, however.

Podemos's political satellites are also intervening to cover for the PSOE-Podemos government's policies. The Spanish Morenoite Workers Revolutionary Current (CRT)

refuses to explain that closing schools is a matter of urgency. Last year, its online publication *Izquierda Diario* defended reopening schools even while acknowledging that the safety of teachers and students "cannot be guaranteed." This year, they have not even published one article on the back-to-school campaign, focusing instead on calling for in-person education in universities.

In an article titled "Semi-in-person education will be the norm again this year," posted yesterday, *Izquierdadiario.es* states: "After a summer in which most of the population has been vaccinated (it is already over 70 percent with two doses) and in which a large part of the restrictions on leisure have disappeared, the students do not understand the recent news that universities will start the course with a semi-in-person system."

Citing CRT members in the student body, it then declares, "the underlying problem is not so much in-person [or not] (on which students themselves take different positions) as 'the lack of democracy in the university, which prevents students from having any voice in decision-making, despite being the majority of the university community'."

Such phrase mongering aims to ensure that working class opposition does not overflow the union bureaucracies, and also aims to tie workers and youth to the PSOE-Podemos government.

The way forward for educators in Spain and across Europe is to oppose school and university reopenings, taking strike struggles out of the hands of the union bureaucracies and turning them into a fight against the ruling class's pandemic policy. This entails building rank-and-file workplace safety committees to fight for the closure of schools and nonessential industries, as part of an international, socialist struggle against the pandemic and the capitalist system.



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