

COVID-19 cases surge among school children in Spain

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29 September 2021

Two weeks after all schools in Spain reopened after the summer break, COVID-19 is clearly infecting growing numbers of children. Children have the highest incidence rates of the virus, due to the reopening of schools by the Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government, the spread of the highly infectious Delta variant, and the fact that this age group is still unvaccinated.

The incidence rates in the past two weeks among children below 11 years of age stands at 113 per 100,000. Those under 11 years are followed by the 30–39-year bracket (70.12 per 100,000); 40–49 (64.61); over 80 (63.83); 20–29 (63.12); 12–19 (57.11); between 60 and 69 (49.69); between 50 and 59 (49.46); and between 70 and 79 (48.64).

Data on contagion in schools and the numbers of schools and classes closed or in quarantine are scant. Spain's regional governments, who are in charge of public education, are scarcely disclosing information. In the north-western region of Galicia, educational centers reported 364 active cases, more than double the number of active COVID-19 cases a year ago (161).

Catalonia has gone from having 836 infected students on September 12, the day schools reopened, to 2,439 two weeks later. The number of classrooms closed due to infections is also growing. In the first week after schools reopened, there were 127 quarantined classrooms. According to the Confederation of Teaching Trade Unions, there were over 1,000 classrooms quarantined in the last three weeks of September.

In Catalonia, schools recorded 246 quarantined groups yesterday, 26 more than the previous week. There are 7,176 people from the educational community in quarantine, 690 more than in the previous count: 6,871 students, 293 educators and 12 external workers.

Valencia authorities confined 64 classrooms at 44 educational centers in the fourth week of September.

The surge in cases is the result of a deliberate policy

implemented by the Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government in collaboration with the Workers Commissions (CCOO) and General Union of Workers (UGT) trade unions. The aim is to ensure that schools remain open, so parents can continue to work and pump out profits for the ruling class.

This policy is supported by the entire ruling establishment—including right-wing Popular Party (PP), Catalan and Basque nationalist or Podemos-backed PSOE regional governments—along with the corporate media, which is barely covering the spread of the virus among children.

The rise in cases was entirely predictable. Spain reopened most of its schools in the second week of September, a month after the US and UK. There, cases surged among kids after schools reopened.

In Scotland, schools reopened on August 16 after the summer break. Two weeks later, as the WSWS reported on August 30, 34 percent of cases were under 19 years old. Public Health Scotland reported a threefold rise in case rates for 16–17-year-olds since August 8, and a fivefold rise for 18–19-year-olds—compared to the national average, which doubled. Test positivity rates for children aged 2–17 stood at nearly 20 percent.

In the US, on August 29, roughly two weeks after some states had reopened schools, the WSWS reported that there were 180,000 child COVID-19 cases in the week ending August 19, a 50 percent increase in just one week. The prior week had seen 120,000 child cases.

All this information was readily available. The PSOE-Podemos government, however, decided to ignore the scientific evidence and reopen schools in pursuit of its “herd immunity” policy of prioritizing profits over human lives, which has already claimed 100,000 lives and infected 10 percent of Spain's population.

Fernando Simón, director of the Center for the Coordination of Health Alerts and Emergencies, is

making clear that the government has no intention of eliminating the virus. Last week, Simón said, “If the objective is to completely eliminate transmission, let’s forget it, it is impossible.” Earlier, he called on the Spanish population “to normalize the situation” and denounced social distancing measures like lockdowns as an overreaction, comparing it to “shooting a fly with a bazooka.”

Mass opposition, however, is mounting throughout Europe, the US and internationally to the homicidal policy of school reopenings, which has found powerful expression in the school strike set to take place in the UK and other countries this Friday, October 1.

The call was initiated by British parent Lisa Diaz statement via Twitter calling for a nationwide school strike in the UK on October 1. Nearly 60,000 British children have been infected with COVID-19 in just the first two weeks of school reopenings. Diaz has been supported by parents and educators in the UK, the US and internationally.

The anger of teachers, students, parents and the rest of the working class must find expression in the formation of rank-and-file committees, leading opposition to the policies of the PSOE-Podemos government and fighting for a policy of eliminating and eradicating of COVID-19.

Such an opposition can only be carried out against the CCOO and UGT trade unions. The unions, along with the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) and pro-Podemos organizations such as the Students in Movement or the Student Union, make up the State Platform for Public Education (Plataforma Estatal por la Escuela Pública—PEEP). PEEP has become a key accomplice of the herd immunity strategy.

In a September 2 statement, it declared: “The educational community, as it did last year, continues to demand the safe return of students at all stages of education.” It also noted that education authorities had eliminated social distancing measures, making education patently unsafe. CCOO released a token statement in late August stating that “it is unacceptable that, in the midst of a pandemic, the course begins without sufficient safety measures and with 5,000 fewer teachers than last year.”

All the PEEP organizations defend the return to class though they themselves recognize that it is not safe. They have not organized any significant national action to oppose the return to work.

As for the CGT (a minority union claiming to be an alternative to the CCOO and UGT), and for the pro-Podemos Student Union and Students in Movement, they

have not even bothered to comment on the pandemic and the return to schools.

This indifference for human lives is equally shared by pseudo-left organizations such as the Morenoist Revolutionary Current of Workers (CRT).

The CRT’s Izquierda Diario website, in a September 15 article on the new school year, claims the main issue facing public education is the budget. It mentions the pandemic only to state: “The isolation protocol for students in the event of COVID or contact [with someone infected] has also been modified, and only students who are not vaccinated will be confined, which may imply a violation of their rights. Furthermore, as the CGT points out, ‘without clear guidelines and without increasing the budget, they intend to create a new hybrid class system (face-to-face / virtual).’”

The lack of budget and safety are important problems issues facing public education internationally. But CRT ignores the elephant in the room: the fact that even if there were sufficient masks, social distancing, and other policies in schools, this would still not entirely halt the transmission of a deadly virus that has already claimed over 15 million lives worldwide. The CRT’s only concern is to ensure that anger in the working class and parents does not escape the confines of the union bureaucracies.

Only the WSWs and the International Committee of the Fourth International through their national sections are resisting these policies. We call on WSWs readers to send messages of support to Lisa’s Twitter account (@sandyboots2020) and distribute her call for the October 1 parents strike.



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