Britain’s Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health calls for school COVID testing to be abandoned

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When the views of a leading medical representative for children on COVID are taken up by the *Daily Telegraph*, it is time to reconsider those views.

Dr Camilla Kingdon, president of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH), has called for COVID testing in schools to end “for the sake of children's education,” the *Telegraph* writes. Secondary school pupils taking two lateral flow tests each week is causing “unnecessary chaos”, according to Kingdon. Children, who are supposedly “not at risk from the virus,” should not be forced to “carry the burden” of the pandemic. “You are asking completely healthy children to test, with the potential to be excluded [from school], there is just a real concern that we are increasing a level of chaos into the system that is unnecessary.”

This argument, whatever her aims, places Dr Camilla Kingdon in the same ideological trench as the open advocates of “herd immunity” and the deliberate mass infection of children with COVID. The only reason a lateral flow test, once checked against a PCR test, will impact on “completely healthy children” is if they are not healthy at all, and are currently asymptomatic.

Kingdon makes her intervention with the support of the RCPCH, even as schools and local authorities who—as noted by the *Telegraph*, “have been told by ministers that many of the restrictions that were in place in the last academic year are no longer necessary” —have “started to step up” anti-COVID measures due to the sharp rise in cases.

The *Telegraph* cites only one other health professional backing up Kingdon, Professor Allyson Pollock of Nottingham University. But it lists numerous Conservative MPs declaring their backing.

Miriam Cates, MP for Penistone and Stocksbridge, calls mass testing in schools “utterly pointless”. Steve Brine, MP for Winchester, complains, “The country is looking the other way, many people have moved on from the pandemic. But in the world of education it is still a pandemic.”

Brine et al want an end to testing in secondary schools so they can proclaim the end of the pandemic. “There are a ‘heck of a lot’ of MPs who want to see testing in schools wound down,” the *Telegraph* quotes Brine. But “It seems to me that ‘Zero Covid’ strategy is alive and well.”

The attack on testing in schools recalls nothing more than the declaration of former US President Donald Trump. In June 2020, he said of a large increase in COVID cases due to the elimination of social distancing requirements, “when you do more testing, you have more cases… It's pretty simple.”

In short, no testing, no pandemic!

How does the RCPCH justify such a dangerous stance? By insisting, “Children and teenagers need to focus on their education and school attendance must be encouraged without being interrupted by routine testing of asymptomatic children and teenagers.”

The RCPCH takes its point of departure on measures to combat COVID based upon the assertion that keeping children in schools is the primary goal. Kingdon’s September 13 “President’s blog” explained, “We formed a view that the loss of access to school is probably the single most important issue for children currently” and that “if vaccination means that 12-15 year olds can have a greater chance of attending school—and staying at school this winter, then we would support its use.”

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Even then, she complained, “routine testing of children without symptoms is still interrupting children and teenagers’ school attendance and we do not believe this should continue. Ultimately, we would advocate for Sars-CoV 2 to be treated as we treat all the other viruses that can cause infection in children and adopt a symptoms-based approach, ie [sic] if your child has a fever or is in any way unwell, they should stay off school. However, they should otherwise attend school.”

Never has the expression “the road to hell is paved with good intentions” been more appropriate. COVID is not a virus among many. It has claimed millions of lives and mutated several times. Infection levels in England are now close to the peak seen at the height of the second pandemic wave, mostly driven by rising rates among schoolchildren.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimates that around one in 10 schoolchildren in Years 7 to 11 in England had Covid last week. The rate for 12-15-year-olds is one in 12. As of October 10, only 1.1 million under-18s had received their first vaccine dose in England, out of an estimated 3.9 million aged 12 to 17. Lab confirmed cases approached 50,000 yesterday and over 7,000 are hospitalised.

Even with the benefits of the vaccine and the relative break in infections due to the summer months, there were 852 UK deaths last week. The UK death toll stands officially at 138,584, but this rises to 163,000 deaths where COVID-19 was mentioned on the death certificate. COVID has claimed the lives of 96 children in the UK.

Up to September 5, 2021, 53,000 children suffered from Long COVID, with 29,000 impacted for up to 12 weeks and 11,000 suffering for more than a year.

Already one in six UK COVID cases have happened since Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s Freedom Day July 17, with more than 2.8 million people testing positive, at a cost of 10,000 lives—more than 100 a day, compared with 259 each day from January 2020 to July 17. But Imperial College London’s REACT-1 study has now found that a “reservoir of Covid infection” in teenagers is already seeping through to older age groups, with Professor Paul Elliott, noting that “high and rising” infections in schools are leading to a higher prevalence of infection in households with children.

Southend’s Director of Public Health Krishna Ramkhelawon warned, “People aren’t testing, and parents aren’t checking them… If 50 percent of the class is self-isolating or unwell, they should move to remote learning.”

This is the real picture in schools, one that can only be made worse still by the RCPCH’s ill-considered intervention.

On the twitter account of Lisa Diaz, the organiser of the Friday School strikes by concerned parents, comments include an NHS worker explaining, “Someone dies of covid every shift, usually weeks after admission. There are sick children with covid on the children's ward. We've had sick prem babies on neonates after early sections to save mum on ICU with covid.” Another writes, “currently around half our level 3 (ventilator) beds are filled with patients with COVID. A lot of the patients are double vaccinated, and pressures are rising from other conditions.”

The standpoint of the RCPCH, of mitigation measures to keep schools open, will only pave the way for a worsening of the public health disaster. It will lead to sick children, sick parents, sometimes protracted illness, and the deaths of both teachers, children and their loved ones. The working class must take a stand for eradication, the elimination of the COVID threat through the global deployment of every weapon in the arsenal of suppressive and containment measures, including the closure of schools, a return to well-funded remote learning, wage support for teachers and parents, until they can be made safe.

Those wishing to discuss such a strategic struggle should attend the October 24 webinar, “How to end the pandemic: The case for eradication.” Register for this important event today.

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