UK government refuses appeals for mitigations as COVID surge threatens to swamp hospitals

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The UK's Conservative government is refusing to make any change to its murderous policy of "learning to live with the virus", amid warnings from National Health Service (NHS) leaders that a Plan B to stop the escalating spread of COVID must be put in place.

To avoid 'stumbling into a winter crisis', the NHS Confederation said that at least mandatory face coverings in crowded and enclosed spaces should be implemented. The body demanded that a Plan C be developed with tougher restrictions if those measures are insufficient, because hospitals already face being overwhelmed.

COVID-19 cases and deaths are surging in Britain, fuelled by the reopening of schools in August and September.

Daily case numbers in Britain have averaged 45,000 over the last seven days and on Monday and Wednesday, hit 49,000—the highest level since July.

More than 300,000 new cases (311,071) were recorded in the week to October 19—an increase of nearly 20 percent. Only the United States (546,319), with a population five times that of Britain had a higher number of cases over the same seven-day period. COVID cases in the US were 1,638 per million of the population and in Britain were 4,551.

COVID hospitalisations and deaths have also sharply increased, despite the suppressive impact of vaccinations. Monday saw 7,749 Covid patients in UK hospitals, a weekly rise of 11 percent, with 868 people per day taken into already overcrowded and overwhelmed NHS units. The 908 deaths recorded over the last week is a 15 percent increase and the 223 deaths Tuesday were the highest since March. Deaths were higher than on the same date in 2020, before the mass vaccination of most of the population was rolled out. Another 179 people were reported dead from COVID Wednesday.

UK cases now account for the bulk of those throughout the European continent. On Monday, the UK recorded more daily cases than France, Germany, Italy and Spain combined. Over the last week, Britain recorded almost 10 times the number of cases as France, despite both having similar sized populations. Compared to Germany, whose population is substantially larger than Britain's, the UK recorded almost five times more cases.

A major factor in this case rate disparity is that the UK's vaccination rollout, after being ahead of other countries in its initial phase, has virtually ground to a halt. Almost a third of Britain's population is not vaccinated, with just 68 percent having had two jabs. Britain now stands at 13th place in Europe for full vaccinations and 22nd in the world.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government refused to intervene to vaccinate children over the summer, allowing schools to become the major source of COVID infections today. Under 30 percent of children aged 12 to 17 have been vaccinated with a single dose, compared with over 60 percent in Italy, 70 percent in France and above 80 percent in Spain.

In addition, some limited mitigation measures are still in place in countries across Europe, whereas the UK abandoned all efforts to stem the pandemic on July 19, dubbed by the political criminal Johnson as "Freedom Day." More than one in six of all UK cases have happened since then.

The Tories will not tolerate any impediment to the profit drive of the major corporations, no matter how

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many become sick or die.

The first response of government to the appeal for the most limited mitigation measures was for Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng to insist yesterday, “I don’t want to reverse back to a situation where we have lockdowns.”

Johnson knew very well that tens of thousands were being condemned to death when he first proclaimed Freedom Day. It was leaked that he had privately accepted that there would be at least a further 30,000 deaths in the UK over the next year. To quantify when “Plan B” restriction such as public mask wearing and urging people to work at home where possible might be introduced, it was suggested that a “sustained rate of death of around a 1,000 a week for two or three weeks”—50,000 a year, would “lead to discussion on restrictions being reimposed.”

With deaths already approaching a 1,000 a week, such a “discussion” has been rejected out of hand. Health Secretary Sajid Javid announced at a Downing Street press conference yesterday that “strengthening our vaccination programme” would be a “our primary line of defence” as “we learn to live with the virus.” This was even as he warned that cases could “go as high as 100,000 a day” in the weeks ahead. If the death rate remains unchanged, this would translate to around 2,000 deaths per week. But with winter and the flus season approaching this would be an optimistic prediction.

The fact that the surge in cases and deaths is being caused primarily by the reopening of schools underscores the criminality of the government’s response.

According to the Office for National Statistics, on October 14, 209,000 children were absent from school for COVID related reasons, including 111,000 confirmed cases. To indicate the explosive spread of the pandemic, the Leicestershire Live online news site reported Wednesday, “The number of Covid-19 cases among school pupils in [the city of] Leicester and [county of] Leicestershire has rocketed and is now around 11 times higher than before the peak of the third wave in June.”

The herd immunity policy of the Tory government has so far resulted in over 8.5 million people being infected with COVID and over 163,000 deaths. Moreover, its allowing the virus to spread unchecked in a partially vaccinated population has now led to the emergence of a yet more contagious and therefore deadly mutation of the still dominant Delta variant that has done so much to escalate the pandemic.

Javid acknowledged in his press conference that that Delta Plus (AY.4.2) is spreading throughout Britain. The *Daily Mail* reported Wednesday, “In just over three months it had reached almost every part of England. More than 2,500 cases of the subtype were detected across the country last week, meaning it now makes up almost 10 percent of all infections.”

It noted, “Scientists say the strain—thought to be 10-15 percent more transmissible than its ancestor—likely first emerged in the UK because of the high number of infections here compared to other countries, which gives the virus more chance to mutate.”

This murderous agenda must be opposed by class conscious workers in alliance with concerned scientists. They can expect no help from the Labour Party or the trade unions in this fight. Sir Keir Starmer spent yesterday boasting of his record in prosecuting terrorists, in response to the murder of Tory MP Sir David Amess, but had nothing to say about the 160,000 deaths from COVID resulting from his own collusion with Johnson. The National Education Union managed a single tweet calling for masks to be worn in secondary schools. Former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn could not even manage such a mealy-mouthed tweet of protest.

On Sunday October 24, the WSWS is holding a webinar that brings together scientists, public health specialists, and working people who are all engaged in the struggle to save lives. The discussion will be aimed at educating, clarifying and laying the basis for effective mass action to end the pandemic. We urge workers and youth throughout Britain and internationally to register and attend this vital event.

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