

# “Fifth wave” of COVID-19 underway in France

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Following a continuous fall in cases since mid-August, the last seven-day period has seen an increase of 11.5 percent in new COVID-19 cases in France. After the seven-day average for cases reached a low of 4,172 on October 9 it has since risen to 4,647. On Tuesday, the total number of people hospitalized for COVID-19 rose for the first time in two months by 15 to 6,483. As of October 17, France’s estimated R0 reproduction rate was 1.05.

In the last week, over 200 people have died from the virus, taking the total number of deaths from COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic to over 118,000. Across Europe the death toll is now over 1.27 million, according to [worldometers.info](https://www.worldometers.info).

In early September, the Pasteur Institute warned that winter conditions will lead to a renewed surge of the virus in France and a peak of hospitalizations exceeding those witnessed in 2020. This calculation was based on assuming that vaccine efficacy does not diminish over time and does not consider the impact of new variants.

Even before the onset in France of cold weather, which typically favors the spread of respiratory viruses, COVID-19’s resurgence is well underway. Without immediate measures to curb the spread of the virus, within a few weeks daily cases will once again be in the tens of thousands.

The rise in cases, despite increasing levels of vaccination in the population, expose the government’s lie that vaccines alone can contain and end the pandemic. As of October 17, 67.4 percent of the population are fully protected, and 75.5 percent have received one dose. While vaccination is a necessary measure to protect the population from severe infection and reduce transmission, it is not sufficient by itself to stop the virus.

It is highly likely conditions in France will resemble

those in the UK within a matter of weeks. Both countries have fully vaccinated around 67 percent of their populations. In the UK, over the last week, average daily cases were 44,251 and nearly 1,000 people died.

The recent decision of the Macron government to remove masks in schools will only further drive the acceleration in infections. Last week, 1180 school classes were closed due to positive COVID cases.

The government’s decision to end free testing on October 15 is set to artificially lower the true level of infection in France in coming weeks. Encouraging people to avoid testing, even when they are symptomatic, will lead to people infected with the virus continuing to go to work, commute and socialize, endangering all those they contact.

The move to end accessible COVID-19 testing, the primary method of tracking of the virus in the population, exposes the ruling class’ determination to jettison all measures to combat the virus.

The decision to reopen schools amid widespread transmission has put millions of children at risk of catching a damaging, and in some cases deadly, virus. It also means that, particularly in primary schools where children are totally unvaccinated, the virus has been able to circulate rapidly before being taken home to parents and families.

Even though the rise in cases after weeks of steady decline proves the pandemic is far from over, it has scarcely been mentioned in the bourgeois press. Where the rise in the rate of infections is acknowledged, the only response has been to dismiss concerns over the increase.

France Info acknowledged the rise in cases but cited France’s high vaccine coverage and the slight fall in deaths over the past week to conclude, “No fifth

epidemic wave, like last autumn, for the moment.” 20Minutes asked “is it the beginning of the fifth wave?” before invoking similar arguments to conclude, “it is of course too earlier to say.”

Critically, these publications ignore the delay between rising infections and deaths that has been observed at every other step of the pandemic in France, as well as in other highly-vaccinated countries like Singapore, which has seen a massive spike in infection and hospitalization despite having 82.4 percent of its population fully vaccinated.

Speaking to *Le Monde* last week, Jean-François Delfraissy, the head of the government’s scientific council, warned: “The other possibility is the emergence of a variant that is even more transmissible or that escapes the immunity conferred by the vaccine.” He added that despite the observed fall in cases observed through September and early October, “In the long term, of course, the crisis is not over.”

The vaccine’s ability to reduce the chance of death and transmission is under constant threat from the development of new variants. While booster shots are essential for added protection, and should be rolled out as widely as possible, they risk being ineffective with the development of new variants. Huge numbers of the population also remain unvaccinated, including all children under 12, 735,000 people aged between 65 and 74, and 638,000 people over 75.

These facts underline the necessity of a scientific policy to eliminate the virus and end the pandemic once and for all.

If capitalist governments across the continent had their way, the virus would have been allowed to circulate freely throughout the pandemic. In March 2020, it was only a wildcat strike movement that began with workers in Italy and spread like wildfire across Europe and in the United States that led to the first, and so far, only, scientific measures to combat the virus.

With the complicity of the corporatist unions, restrictions were ended prematurely in France and the progress that had been made toward eliminating the virus was lost. Since then, various limited lockdowns in France have only been implemented by the government when threatened with social unrest and a renewed movement of the working class.

As France enters a fifth wave it is again at a crucial juncture. The working class must fight back against the

herd immunity policy enforced by Macron and the unions. Hundreds of thousands of lives throughout Europe and within France are once more at stake. This struggle requires the formation of rank-and-file committees in every workplace, school, and neighborhood throughout France.

These committees must be guided by a scientific perspective to eliminate the virus. This must include stringent distancing measures, the mass production and distribution of the vaccine throughout the world, full income for all during the necessary period of isolation, and an adequate track and trace system.

The WSWs is hosting an event “How to end the pandemic” on October 24 (in English) to arm the working class with the scientific knowledge necessary to fight for this political perspective. Workers and young people are warmly encouraged to attend. Sign up [here](#).



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