

Ukraine's daily COVID-19 cases and deaths hit record highs

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Ukraine reported a record high number of daily COVID-19 deaths this past week, a result of the disastrous policies pursued by the Ukrainian government and capitalist governments all over the world. The Eastern European country of approximately 41 million is simultaneously Europe's poorest country and one of its least vaccinated against COVID-19.

On October 30, Ukraine's Health Ministry registered a new record of 26,198 new cases, the fourth highest number in the world. Among them were 1,108 children and 178 medical workers. The country also recorded 541 deaths, also one of the highest figures in the world. On October 26, Ukraine had reported a record 734 deaths in 24 hours.

The country's overall death toll now stands at 71,710, according to data from John Hopkins University. Ukraine's Ministry of Health reported earlier in October that 29,000 children are infected and that 42 children had died of the disease.

The situation is equally catastrophic in neighboring Russia, which continues to break its daily records in new deaths and infections. On October 29, Russia recorded 1,163 deaths, the highest number yet, and daily infections have repeatedly surpassed 40,000 last week. As of last week, almost 60,000 children in Russia were receiving medical care for COVID-19, with half of them showing "acute" symptoms. Last week, Moscow's Mayor Sergei Sobyenin acknowledged that each day, about 1,000 children were getting infected in the capital, and between 20 and 30 had to be hospitalized.

Ukraine has an even lower vaccination rate than Russia, where only 32.5 percent are fully vaccinated, and 37.9 percent have received at least one jab. In Ukraine, just 7 million out of 41 million, or 16 percent, of the adult population are fully vaccinated—the second

lowest share in Europe after Armenia's rate of slightly over 7 percent.

According to Health Minister Viktor Lyashko, 94 percent of COVID-19 patients requiring hospitalization are unvaccinated.

The current situation, however, is due not only to low vaccination rates but above all the criminal refusal of the government to impose necessary public health measures to stop the spread of the virus.

Despite clear signs in late summer that the spread of the Delta variant in the country would spell disaster, the government of President Volodymyr Zelensky refused until the end of September to begin implementing social distancing and lockdown measures, at which point daily case rates had already begun to accelerate and reach into the high thousands.

Throughout the summer, the country enforced what it called an "adaptive lockdown," which allowed regional authorities to tighten or ease restrictions depending on the situation locally. Whatever measures were imposed within this framework were totally inadequate and weakly enforced, permitting the Delta variant to spread unchecked.

In late September, the government announced that it would extend a state of emergency until the end of the year and issued a "yellow" warning for the entire country, which does little more than limit mass events and mandates mask wearing.

In the capital Kiev, Mayor Vitali Klitschko waited until Thursday to announce new restrictions to stem the virus's spread. Starting November 1, restaurants, shopping centers and gyms will be closed and public transport limited to those who can show proof of vaccination or a negative PCR test.

As has been the case in many countries of the former Soviet Union where governments have promoted ethnic

nationalism and religious obscurantism since 1991, widespread anti-vaccine propaganda in Ukraine has further undermined any attempts to contain the spread of the Delta variant.

In the western Ukrainian city of Chernivtsi, Dr. Olha Kovebko told the Associated Press that the Orthodox Church, of which 67 percent of Ukrainians are members, bears a substantial share of responsibility for anti-vaccine sentiments. “Some Orthodox priests have openly and aggressively urged people not to get vaccinated, and social networks have been filled with the most absurd rumors.” She added, “Ukrainians have learned to distrust any authorities’ initiatives, and vaccination isn’t an exclusion.”

In the Chernivtsi hospital where Dr. Kovebko works, there are just 120 beds and currently has 126 gravely ill COVID-19 patients. She reported seeing 10-23 patients dying every day at her hospital.

The Zelensky government has attempted to promote vaccination in recent months as the Delta variant spread by requiring teachers, government employees and other workers to be fully vaccinated by November 8. Proof of vaccination or a negative test will now be needed to travel on planes, trains and long-distance buses.

However, such measures have come too little too late. Moreover, the Zelensky government shares responsibility for the spread of vaccine misinformation and backwardness. For blatantly political reasons, it rejected the use of the readily available Russian Sputnik V vaccine and suggested it could be potentially dangerous.

In February, after refusing to permit the use of the vaccine, Zelensky stated that “Ukrainian citizens are not guinea pigs.” Later, he said, “We have no right to perform experiments on them.”

Sputnik V’s effectiveness and safety were confirmed by data published in *Nature* magazine in July.

Meanwhile, the desperate attempts of the Ukrainian government to solicit help from its imperialist backers for the vaccination effort fell largely on deaf ears .

Zelensky himself publicly displayed an unserious attitude towards the pandemic and downplayed the virus’s danger. In June of 2020 he told the newspaper *Ukrainska Pravda* that he had considered purposely contracting the virus just to prove to people “it’s not the plague.”

Many of Ukraine’s hospitals, already poorly supplied

and understaffed, are now completely overwhelmed by the wave of Delta variant cases and deaths. According to Health Minister Viktor Lyashko, two-thirds of the country’s hospital beds with oxygen supplies are now occupied, and hospitals nationally are 65 percent full.

“The situation with hospitalisations is getting rampant,” Lyashko said. “I call on all of you to get your vaccine. We can and must stop these sad statistics.”

Unfortunately, all signs point to the continuation of such “sad statistics” as the Ukrainian government and governments all over the world continue to subordinate the fight against COVID-19 to the interests of capitalist profit.

As the WSWS has reported, as important as they are, vaccines alone will not end the pandemic. Only a conscious global effort directed by scientists and rooted in a movement by the working class can lead to the end of the pandemic in Ukraine and across the globe.



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