

Johnson government declares Britain “nowhere near” needing tough measures to combat Omicron variant

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Prime Minister Boris Johnson addressed the nation at an emergency press conference Saturday, confirming his government will take no serious public health measures to protect the population from the deadly Omicron variant of SARS-Cov-2.

Saturday’s press conference followed confirmation that two people in the UK—one in Essex, the other in Nottingham—had contracted the Omicron variant. Both cases are linked to recent travel from southern Africa. Omicron infections have been confirmed in Australia, the Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium, Botswana, Germany, Hong Kong, Israel and Italy. At least seven further cases have been detected in the UK.

Johnson told the press conference, “it does appear that Omicron spreads very rapidly, and can be spread between people who are double vaccinated. There is also a very extensive mutation which means it diverges quite significantly from previous configurations of the virus, and as result, it might—at least in part—reduce the protection of our vaccines over time.”

Chris Whitty, Chief Medical Officer, said Omicron was spreading rapidly, “in Gauteng province [South Africa] 90 percent of cases reported and genotyped are of this new variant.” He continued, “there are extensive mutations on the spike proteins—the bit that all the vaccines are against. So, there is a reasonable chance that there will be at least some degree of vaccine escape with this variant.”

But despite such dire warnings, both Whitty and Chief Scientific Adviser Sir Patrick Vallance colluded with the government in rejecting even its own minimal Plan B measures—including working from home where possible, compulsory mask-wearing indoors and mandatory vaccination certificates in designated social settings—previously suggested by the Scientific Advisory

Group for Emergencies (SAGE) to avoid a winter lockdown.

Instead, Johnson proposed a handful of “targeted and proportionate measures.” He stressed, “we’re not going to stop people travelling,” announcing merely that new arrivals from “red list” countries would be required to take a PCR test within the first two days and to self-isolate until they receive a negative result. Four more countries in southern Africa were added to the red list on Saturday: Angola, Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia, joining South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Lesotho, Botswana and Eswatini—an indication itself of the swift spread of the disease.

All suspected contacts of those infected with Omicron would be required to self-isolate for 10 days. Contacts would be located via the UK Health Security Agency’s track and trace—a system that is widely regarded as dysfunctional.

Only two additional measures were announced. Compulsory mask-wearing in shops and on public transport will be reintroduced Tuesday and booster jabs will be made available to those under 40, with further details to be announced by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) today.

Johnson made clear that lockdown measures—working from home, the pausing of non-essential work, and the temporary closure of pubs, bars and other indoor locations—would not be countenanced. Asked by the BBC’s Iain Watson, “why have you not gone in harder?”, Johnson replied, “We think this is the right approach to Omicron given the uncertainties we have.”

Johnson’s entire presentation was based on a charnel house of lies. “The UK continues to be in a much, much, stronger position,” he told the press conference. In fact, the UK has led Europe in the number of cases,

hospitalisations and deaths from Covid since his government's ending of public health measures on July 19 "Freedom Day."

Since then, nearly five million people have been infected by COVID-19 and more than 16,000 have died. Average daily deaths are running at 153 (based on the past two months), or more than 1,000 fatalities every week. On Friday, more than 50,000 new cases were reported—the seventeenth-highest daily case number since the pandemic began.

Johnson, Whitty and Vallance sought to justify the piecemeal and limited measures they announced by explaining that the precise impact of the Omicron variant is unknown. "We don't yet exactly know how effective our vaccines will be against Omicron," Johnson declared. Both Whitty and Vallance concurred that the government's "precautionary measures" were aimed at "buying time" so that scientists and public health experts could determine the extent of Omicron's vaccine resistance and its burden of illness and mortality.

In other words, the Johnson government and its chief advisors on SAGE have determined to junk the precautionary principle that is the bedrock of epidemiology, muzzle science and transform public health policy into a macabre form of roulette, with millions of human beings used in the place of gambling chips. A smiling Johnson told the press conference, "I'm absolutely confident that this Christmas will be considerably better than last Christmas."

Mehring Books, the publishing arm of the Socialist Equality Party (US), is proud to announce the publication in epub format of Volume 1 of *COVID, Capitalism, and Class War: A Social and Political Chronology of the Pandemic*, a compilation of the *World Socialist Web Site's* coverage of this global crisis.

On Sunday, it was left to Health Secretary Sajid Javid to spell out the economic calculations behind his government's inaction, telling Sky TV there were no plans for extra restrictions including working from home. "We know now that those type of measures do carry a very heavy price, both economically, socially, in terms of non-Covid health outcomes such as the impact on mental health," he said.

"If one was to make decisions like that, it would have to be done very, very carefully. We're not there yet. We're nowhere near that."

Javid's homicidal statements were matched by those of the British press, with the *Telegraph's* editorial declaring, "the self-isolation measures announced are harsh and will

have severe economic and personal impacts," concluding, "We should never again put up with any restriction where the costs outweigh the benefits."

The responsibility of the Johnson government for the current parlous state of pandemic response was underscored over the weekend by revelations that Clive Dix, former head of the government's own vaccine taskforce, submitted a blueprint six months ago on how to prepare for deadly new Covid variants that was ignored. Dix told the *Observer* newspaper, "I wrote a very specific proposal on what we should put in place right now for the emergence of any new virus that escaped the vaccine," he said. "That was written and handed into the [vaccine taskforce] at the end of April when I left. I haven't seen a sign of any of those activities yet.

"I sent a note to No 10 [in May] saying I think this is still an emergency and it should be dealt with urgently—and I want it on public record that you've got my proposal. But I didn't even get a response to that. I prodded the government and said, 'What's going on, because we need to do this'."

The UK should expect "substantially more cases" of Omicron in the days ahead, SAGE member Professor Neil Ferguson told BBC Radio 4 yesterday. He said it was likely the variant had already "seeded" and estimated there could be as many as 100 cases across Britain. He urged ministers to keep "all options," including lockdown restrictions, on the table. But his appeals will be rejected by Labour and the Tories alike, who are ferocious defenders of the financial oligarchy.

Labour has broadly supported the government's announcement on Saturday, with its Shadow Health Secretary Jon Ashworth—who has himself this week contracted COVID-19—merely calling for faster vaccine rollout and a few other partial, inadequate measures that leave the government's murderous herd immunity strategy intact.



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