

G7 health ministers agree to do nothing over Omicron variant threat

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The health ministers of the seven major imperialist powers met yesterday in what was trailed as an “emergency meeting” in light of “the new Omicron Covid-19 variant spreading across the world.”

The online session was attended by representatives from United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan, plus a guest from the European Union.

A concluding statement declared in its first paragraph, “The global community is faced, at a first evaluation, with the threat of a new, highly transmissible variant of COVID-19, which requires urgent action.” But the ministers agreed to do virtually nothing to prevent the spread of Omicron.

The rest of the communiqué, just five paragraphs and less than 200 words long, consisted of a series of pat phrases. One could almost hear their feet dragging as the ministers declared “strong support to set up an international pathogen surveillance network within the framework of the World Health Organization (WHO).”

All agreed with the “strategic relevance of ensuring access to vaccines” and “providing operational assistance, taking forward our donation commitments, and tackling vaccine misinformation, as well as supporting research and development.”

The Omicron variant has now been detected in at least 17 countries, including five of the G7 nations. Japan and the US are the only exceptions—with the US likely due to its poor testing system. Along with Britain, Canada, France, Germany and Italy, the new variant has been found in Denmark, Hong Kong, Israel, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Botswana, South Africa, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the Netherlands.

There will be no “urgent action” by any of the G7 or other capitalist powers to stop this spread.

- In the United States, with almost 50 million total

COVID cases and whose official death toll passed 800,000 yesterday, President Joe Biden said with criminal complacency, “Sooner or later we’re going to see cases of this new variant in the United States,” but it “is a cause for concern, not a cause for panic”. Biden declared that his administration would not implement “shutdowns or lockdowns,” vowing to “reopen our country ... reopen our businesses” and ... “reopen our schools.”

- In Britain, the Johnson government’s herd immunity policy has seen over 10.1 million infected, (almost 15 percent of the population) and more than 167,000 people dead. Eleven cases of the Omicron variant have been detected so far, including six cases in Scotland. Health Minister Sajid Javid, who convened the G7 meeting, told MPs afterwards only that the UK’s vaccination and booster programme would be stepped up.

- In Canada (over 1.7 million cases and almost 30,000 deaths), virtually all non-pharmaceutical anti-COVID-19 public health measures have been withdrawn, facilitating the widespread transmission of the virus. At least six possible cases of Omicron have been detected in the last 48 hours. Dr Malgorzata Gasperowicz, a developmental biologist, tweeted on Sunday, “Waves don’t come by themselves. Bad policies make waves.”

- In France (7.6 million cases and 118,894 deaths), eight possible cases of Omicron have been detected. The virus has been allowed to run rampant, with 31,600 COVID-19 cases recorded Sunday and 37,218 Monday. All flights have been suspended from southern Africa but only until December 1.

- In Germany (5.8 million cases and 101,558 deaths) sitting Chancellor Angela Merkel and her successor Olaf Scholz are waiting until today before holding talks

over possible further restrictions. On Monday, Germany saw another weekly infection rate record, with 452.4 per 100,000 people contracting the virus.

- Italy passed five million COVID cases over the weekend and has seen 133,739 deaths. The 82,131 cases over the last seven days were a 25 percent increase over the previous week. According to Bloomberg, “The first Italian to test positive for the omicron variant had a negative test before his flight and moved around Italy for days before his diagnosis...” The man arrived in Rome on November 12, travelled to his home in a town north of Naples and then flew to Milan for a previously scheduled medical exam. The other five members of his family have also tested positive for COVID.

- In Japan (1.7 million cases and 18,358 deaths) cases ran rampant under the previous government of Yoshihide Suga. Japan hosted the Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo, despite widespread opposition and warnings from medical experts. Less than a month ago, Japan eased travel rules for foreigners and reduced the quarantine period from 14 to 10 days for those vaccinated. With the news of the circulation of the Omicron mutation, Suga’s successor Fumio Kishida authorised the closure of Japan’s borders from Tuesday.

Speaking to the *World Socialist Web Site* yesterday, immunologist Dr Anthony Leonardi, warned, “The Omicron variant is probably everywhere, and it now has a huge capability to mutate... As it outpaces Delta, it’s going to create even more infections. It’ll therefore evolve even faster than Delta. But you never know because any one of these variants can now get into an immunocompromised person and just do some fantastic evolution.”

The callous indifference of the practitioners of herd immunity internationally was summed up in the comments of UK Health Minister Javid. Speaking to the media Sunday—after Prime Minister Boris Johnson had revealed the previous day that cases of Omicron were circulating in Britain and that masks would be required in shops and on public transport from today—Javid said that there was no need for any extra restrictions to be implemented. “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.”

The G7 statement concluded with a declaration amounting to a collective shrug. “Ministers committed to continue to work closely together, with WHO and international partners to share information and monitor Omicron. Ministers committed to meeting again in December,” without a date even being specified.

This mirrors Saturday’s statement by Johnson who told everyone that the situation would be reviewed in three weeks and that all should continue to act as normal and prepare for a Christmas that “will be considerably better” than last year.

These are policies aimed at the deliberate further mass infection of the population, motivated by ensuring that the profits of big business are in no way curtailed during the busy holiday season.

Even as the G7 meeting proceeded, it was reported that Spain and Sweden had found cases of Omicron and that pockets of infection not linked to travel had been detected in Scotland and Portugal.

The Johnson government has pursued a homicidal policy against schoolchildren, with the virus allowed to spread freely among the youngest in society for the bulk of the pandemic. 113 children are dead as a result. Hundreds of thousands of children have been forced out of classrooms due to illness and needing to self-isolate. Among the first cases of Omicron in Britain was one traced back yesterday to a primary school in Essex, England.

Even as they feign concern over the spread of Omicron, the political representatives of the capitalist class will move rapidly to tear up even the mildest regulations they have been forced to put in place. Speaking to MPs Monday, with many baying for restrictions to be permanently shelved, Javid insisted, “If it emerges that this variant is no more dangerous than the Delta variant, then we won’t keep [these] measures in place for a day longer than necessary.”



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