

ECDC warns Omicron variant to become dominant in Europe in a “few months”

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Yesterday, the European Centers for Disease Control (ECDC) warned that the new Omicron variant of COVID-19 will rapidly become dominant in the European Union (EU). It noted that the Omicron variant of concern (VOC) is more transmissible than the Delta variant, which currently causes most cases in Europe.

The ECDC noted that “preliminary data from South Africa suggest that it may have a substantial growth advantage over the Delta VOC. If this is the case, mathematical modelling indicates that the Omicron VOC is expected to cause over half of all SARS-CoV-2 infections in the EU/EEA within the next few months. The greater Omicron’s growth advantage over the Delta VOC and the greater its circulation in the EU/EEA, the shorter the expected time until the Omicron VOC causes the majority of all SARS-CoV-2 infections.”

This announcement has far-reaching implications, as genetic studies of the Omicron variant show it is likely substantially resistant to existing COVID-19 vaccines. “The presence of multiple mutations in the spike protein of the Omicron VOC indicates a high likelihood of reduction of neutralising activity by antibodies induced by infection or vaccination,” the ECDC declared.

The ECDC’s statement followed similar warnings from Stéphane Bancel, the CEO of the Moderna pharmaceutical firm, to the *Financial Times*. “There is no world, I think, where [the effectiveness] is the same level ... we had with Delta,” Bancel said. Speaking of vaccines’ effectiveness against the Omicron variant, he said, “I think it’s going to be a material drop,” adding that “all the scientists I’ve talked to ... are like, ‘this is not going to be good.’”

Governments across Europe are, however, relying almost exclusively on vaccinations, rejecting critical social distancing measures needed to eliminate viral transmission, even as the Delta variant devastates the continent. This has led to a disaster, as there are hundreds

of millions of unvaccinated people in Europe, and the Delta variant is more resistant to vaccines than the initial strain of the virus. Already, Europe sees nearly 3 million infections and 30,000 deaths of COVID-19 each week.

Infections are at record or near-record levels, with Germany yesterday reporting 73,486, Britain 53,945, France 49,610, the Netherlands 23,043, Czechia 21,126 and Belgium 20,409. Moreover, infections are rising rapidly in parts of Southern Europe which had seen lower infection rates this autumn, with Italy reporting 16,806 cases and Spain 14,500. Deaths are at near-record levels in Russia (1,221), and Germany saw over 400 daily deaths several days this week.

There are already dozens of confirmed cases of the Omicron variant across Western Europe, however, threatening an even more drastic escalation of the pandemic. There are at least 16 confirmed cases in the Netherlands, 9 in Britain, 8 in France, 4 in Denmark and Germany, 2 in Spain, and one each in Sweden, Norway, Czechia, Austria, Belgium and Italy.

In the Danish city of Aalborg, a man at a packed Martin Jensen concert with 1,600 people tested positive for the Omicron variant, leading to fears of a superspreader event. Danish authorities are asking people who attended the concert to immediately get tested.

Nick Holm, the director of the Aalborg Congress and Culture Centre, where the concert took place, insisted his staff had strictly followed health procedures. “We follow the guidelines to the letter. In this regard, no one has come in without having a valid corona pass,” Holm said. This again underscores the likelihood that the Omicron variant can evade existing COVID-19 vaccines.

Even before the emergence of the Omicron variant, the World Health Organization (WHO) was warning that over 700,000 could die of COVID-19 in Europe by March. With the new variant, the number of COVID-19 deaths this winter in Europe could reach into the millions.

Despite this dramatic situation, however, governments across Europe refuse to take the necessary measures to contain the virus. On the contrary, they are continuing the “profits before lives” policy that has already led to more than 1.5 million deaths on the continent.

“Despite the Omicron variant, our current strategy remains unchanged,” French Health Minister Olivier Véran told the *Sud Ouest* newspaper on Tuesday. He ruled out lockdown measures such as closing schools and nonessential businesses that would be necessary to eliminate transmission of the virus. All that is necessary, he claimed, is “vaccination, both initial and booster, social distancing and wearing masks.”

Spain’s Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government has published a “message of tranquility” to the Spanish people, insisting that no measures besides masking and vaccines are necessary. It declared, “We must do what we have been doing throughout this pandemic: responsibility and solidarity in vaccinating ourselves, to use masks and so defend our health and those of our compatriots.”

The aim of this policy of social murder is to avoid any shelter-at-home orders that would slow the flow of corporate profits to the banks and avoid any broader, internationally coordinated social mobilization of the population to halt transmission of the virus.

The reaction of the ruling class in Germany is no less criminal. Even though over 73,000 people were infected yesterday and nearly 400 died of COVID-19 in Germany, and intensive care patients from Germany, Austria and the Netherlands must be transferred to other European countries as hospitals in many regions are overloaded, there is no serious action.

The decisions taken yesterday at the Conference of German state presidents were totally inadequate. At the meeting, acting Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU), her designated successor Olaf Scholz (SPD) and the different state presidents agreed only on some additional contact restrictions for the unvaccinated, the introduction of a 2G rule (vaccinated or recovered) in retail and the reintroduction of mandatory masks in schools. Private fireworks on New Year’s Eve are prohibited.

Large events such as soccer matches or concerts, on the other hand, will still be allowed. There is to be only a cap: a maximum of 5,000 (!) people inside and 15,000 (!) outside.

All parties in the Bundestag—from the far-right AfD to the Left Party—vehemently reject the closure of schools and nonessential production. Last week, the soon governing “traffic light” coalition parties (SPD, Greens

and FDP), ended the “epidemic situation of national scope,” thus eliminating the legal basis for strict nationwide protective measures.

They are supported in this by the unions, which have opposed lockdowns and called to keep businesses and schools open since the pandemic began. “The fact that mass events are taking place while schools are being closed, that’s not on. Everything must be done to ensure that educational institutions remain open,” the Education and Science Union (GEW) wrote on Twitter on Tuesday.

The pandemic reveals the deep class divide that separates workers from the unions and all pseudo-left parties of the upper middle classes. While the latter push opening policies in the interests of finance capital, the vast majority of the population favors strict lockdown measures. According to the “Trendbarometer” of RTL and ntv published on Tuesday, 65 percent of German citizens—a noticeable increase over the previous week (61 percent)—are in favor of a general “lockdown.” This data was moreover collected before the Omicron variant became widely known.

To enforce the necessary protective measures and save lives, the working class must take the situation into its own hands and intervene as an independent political force. To do this, it must establish rank-and-file safety committees in all schools and workplaces that will initiate the scientifically necessary emergency measures and fight the pandemic based on a global strategy of eliminating transmission of the virus.



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