

COVID-19 infections in France explode to over 60,000 per day

Anthony Torres
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As the vaccine-resistant Omicron variant spreads across Europe, daily new cases in France are exploding, rising from 5,940 cases to over 60,000 in just one month. The incidence rate in France is now over 500 cases per 100,000. December 15 saw 65,713 confirmed new cases and 882,949 active cases of COVID-19 in France, more than ever before in the pandemic.

The explosion of COVID-19 cases, helped by the onset of winter, highlights the failure of the Macron government's mitigation strategy. It relies solely on a vaccination policy while imposing the maintenance of non-essential production and in-person learning, facilitating a massive spread of the virus. This encourages mutations and the emergence of new variants, by allowing the circulation of huge quantities of the virus subject to the evolutionary pressures imposed by vaccination.

Even though the Omicron variant is only beginning to surge in France, incidence rates are already skyrocketing. Among the regions with the highest incidence rates are Drôme (978.6 per 100,000), Ardèche (923.6), Alpes de Hautes Provence (823.3) and Bouches du Rhône (752.7). In France, the Omicron variant represented zero percent of the sequencing from 15 to 29 November. Over the next two weeks, from 29 November to 13 December, the share of Omicron cases rose to 5 per cent.

Six metropolitan regions of France have reactivated the "white plan," which allows hospitals to postpone other medical operations to focus on treating COVID-19 patients. These are Corsica, the Riviera, the Paris area, the Occitania region around Toulouse, the Loire Valley, and Burgundy.

Health Minister Olivier Véran has indicated that the white plan "will probably be national in scope within a few days." He added that there was "one admission to

intensive care every 6 minutes, compared to every 10 minutes last week." The rate of occupation of intensive care beds by patients with COVID-19 is 46.5 per cent, "mostly non-vaccinated [or] immunocompromised" vaccinated patients, according to Véran.

Children are among the main victims of the politically-criminal policies of the capitalist state. According to data from Friday 10 December 2021 (and going back to 6 December), 10,438 positive cases were counted per day in children under 10. The seven-day incidence rate for COVID-19 in children aged 6 to 10 years old has risen above 1,000 cases per 100,000 children. This is an increase from the previous week (+1755 cases). Among 10-19 year olds, the figure was 11,349 new cases, again according to the same data (+3083 cases).

Even before the spread of the Omicron variant, which is far more harmful to children, many children are hospitalised for COVID-19 in France. 101 children aged 0-9 years were hospitalised on 9 December 2021, 17 more than the previous week. The number of children and adolescents in intensive care for COVID-19 was 14 children aged 0-9 years on these wards on 9 December 2021, 4 more than the previous week. Three patients aged 10-19 years were in intensive care, 1 more than 7 days previously.

The vaccination of 5-11 year olds is currently under discussion within the state machine. The French National Authority for Health (HAS) has already given the green light to vaccinate children at risk of developing severe forms of the disease, for example those suffering from chronic liver disease, chronic heart and respiratory disease or obesity. It has not yet decided on the others.

The alarming figures on the circulation of the Delta variant will be compounded by the spread of the

Omicron variant, which is spreading more rapidly, putting workers and youth at risk of death.

As Prime Minister Boris Johnson warned in a televised address on Sunday 12 December that a “tidal wave of Omicron is coming,” the Health Safety Agency is predicting that more than one million daily cases by the end of December in the UK due to the infectiousness of Omicron.

The Omicron variant will be dominant in Europe within weeks. British health authorities fear that up to 75,000 more people will die in the UK by April if nothing is done to counter the variant. Denmark has 195 cases identified as of 9 December, Norway 109 and the Netherlands 62; at least according to official statistics, these are among the most affected countries in Europe.

The rise in Omicron-related cases in France underlines once again that, without a mobilisation of workers to impose a collective and international use of social resources to eliminate the virus, the spread of the variants will not spare any country.

The Macron government has already indicated that it will not take any serious measures to stop the epidemic. On Thursday 9 December, during his press conference about France’s presidency of the European Council, President Emmanuel Macron said he did not know whether the new health measures announced by Prime Minister Jean Castex would be enough to counter the COVID-19 epidemic. Macron said that he and his government will evaluate “the evolution of the epidemic early next week.”

Macron’s government, however, has already demonstrated its murderous indifference to human life in the service of the political and economic interests of the financial elite. The pandemic has claimed 1.5 million lives in Europe. But meanwhile, by keeping workers on the job all the time despite the pandemic in order to provide a return on capital, European billionaires have increased their wealth by more than \$1 trillion.

The pandemic has graphically exposed the class character of the capitalist state. The ruling circles see the death of the elderly, with the resulting reduction in life expectancy and welfare costs, as a positive or at least an acceptable result of their health policy.

In reality, it is possible to stop the pandemic and eliminate the virus. The measures needed to eliminate

COVID-19 include temporary closure of schools and non-essential workplaces with welfare for all affected workers; mass testing; contact tracing; isolation of infected patients; provision of high-quality masks; and rapid vaccination of the world’s population. But the past two years have already demonstrated the government’s radical hostility to such a scientific policy.

Imposing health policies that can stop the pandemic and the development of new variants, and thus save millions of lives, requires the building of an international socialist movement in the working class, allied with scientists, aimed at a fundamental and revolutionary transformation of the economic structure of society.



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