

As UK Omicron cases and deaths surge, Johnson government does nothing to protect population

Robert Stevens
20 December 2021

On Sunday, the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) announced that 12 people in Britain had died with the Omicron variant and 104 were currently in hospital with it. With 12,133 additional cases confirmed across Britain Sunday and another 8,044 Monday, this brought the total for the new variant to 45,145.

These are only the confirmed cases. Scientific advisers told the government over the weekend that in reality there are already hundreds of thousands of daily Omicron infections. The growing number of deaths due to Omicron puts paid to false statement from governments around the world that the variant is “mild.”

On Monday, another 91,743 new coronavirus cases and 44 deaths were announced, the third time in a matter of days that the UK has reported more than 90,000 daily cases. Each Monday normally sees a smaller number of cases reported due to reporting delays over the weekend, yet yesterday’s figure was the second highest daily total on record.

The Omicron variant is ripping through the capital London. An *Evening Standard* investigation published Monday found that cases had “exploded by up to 500 per cent among young adults and also increased among pensioners.”

Citing “front of house staff shortages which have been impacted by Covid-19 infections and isolation requirements,” London’s Natural History Museum announced Monday it will temporarily close. A number of other major tourist attractions, including Edinburgh Castle and leading cultural venues have also shut their doors.

Despite warnings from its own advisers that the ineffectual “Plan B” measures currently in place will allow the population to be overwhelmed by an avalanche of COVID cases and deaths, Johnson announced no new measures yesterday after meeting with his Cabinet.

The UK prime minister has been one of the world’s foremost advocates of a herd immunity agenda, declaring last year, “no more f**cking lockdowns, let the bodies pile high in their thousands.” The *Times* reports that a sizable proportion of his Cabinet is determined to hold him to that statement and opposes any measures that would hinder the spread of the deadly virus. “A third of the cabinet have made clear that they will not support them and have questioned official modelling,” it explained. The newspaper added that “[Chancellor] Rishi Sunak was one of at least ten cabinet ministers who were resisting calls by scientific advisers for tougher curbs to be introduced before Christmas.”

The money-mad representatives of the financial elite will not allow any anything to impede the profit-making concerns of big business in the pre-Christmas period. The *Mail* cited one of the Cabinet figures opposed to any anti-COVID measures who “made clear they will quit if there is a return to lockdown,” and said, “hospitals are not being overwhelmed” and “we’re in a battle to save Christmas.”

Serving these interests, Johnson claimed absurdly on Monday that arguments for and against further restrictions are “finely balanced” and that there are “some things that we need to be clearer about before we decide to go further.” The government, he said, “will have to reserve the possibility of taking further action.”

The government’s own Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) have advised that between 3,000 and 10,000 people could be hospitalised with COVID each day from January if Plan B is continued.

With the refusal of the social murderers in Downing Street to take any action, large sections of the population have gone into an effective self-imposed lockdown, with millions also queuing up to receive a vaccination. On

Saturday 904,598 people received a third dose, 44,599 a second and 37,492 a first.

The numbers of people in city centres and retail outlets that are normally heaving at this time of year are significantly down. Due to a lack of customers, many pubs, restaurants and cafes are closing their doors or moving to reduced hours.

The *Daily Mail* complained yesterday, “Offices and city centres have been abandoned as Omicron cases continue to soar across Britain—with many businesses now working from home in the run-up to Christmas after the government latest ‘work from home if you can’ advice, leaving roads empty and public transport barely used.”

“Transport for London said there were 660,000 entries or exits on the Tube up to 10am this morning—down 35% week-on-week, and down 46% over a fortnight. There were 720,000 boarding taps on buses for the same period this morning—down 38% week-on-week.”

Trafalgar Square, one of London’s main attractions, was deserted Monday.

In the absence of a coordinated policy to bring down infections, however, huge numbers of people, especially frontline workers, continue to contract the disease. The continued staggering increase in COVID cases has brought the National Health Service (NHS) to its knees, with the British Medical Association warning that almost 50,000 health care workers could be sick with the virus by Christmas.

How dire the situation is was summed by Professor John Edmunds, who advises the government as a member of SAGE. He told the *Times*, “We’re close to the point where there already may be enough cases in the system to overwhelm the NHS.” The newspaper reported yesterday, “Edmunds said it was possible that the UK had as many as 400,000 Omicron infections yesterday and that the doubling time is believed to be roughly two days.”

The latest warnings came amid revelations by the *Independent* over the weekend that “London’s ambulance service is in the midst of a severe crisis, with 100 emergency service vehicles taken off the road for two days in a row due to hundreds of staff being unable to work because of Covid.” The newspaper reported that at a London Ambulance Service Trust briefing last Friday, attendees were informed that Omicron meant that “we’re going to be engulfed.”

The crisis-ridden Johnson government has been reliant on the backing of the opposition Labour Party to remain in office since the outset of the pandemic. In alliance with the trade unions, they function as a de facto coalition with

Johnson. A critical role has been played by both in keeping open schools so that parents are able to be in work churning out profits for big business. Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer infamously insisted that schools remain open “no ifs, no buts,” while National Education Union leader Kevin Courtney regularly issues tirades against any measure that could cause “education disruption.”

They are now doubling down to ensure that schools open up again in two weeks’ time after the Christmas holidays, no matter what—despite them being the main vector for the transmission of COVID. The *TES* reports that Labour’s shadow schools minister Stephen Morgan has written to the Department for Education calling for a “proper workforce plan” for schools in the new year in order to prevent “defacto school closures.”

Under conditions in which 120 children of all ages are already dead from COVID and one in 20 primary children are infected with the disease, Morgan called for a few useless mitigations as a pretext, declaring, “I urge you to ramp up basic Covid protections in schools to minimise ongoing disruption to children’s education and keep kids learning together next term. We both agree schools must be open, with real and effective steps to drive down transmission in every community.”

Summing up Labour’s alliance with the Johnson government, Labour Mayor of London Sadiq Khan, despite having to declare a “major incident” due to COVID cases in the capital on Saturday, told the BBC’s *Andrew Marr Show* Sunday, “I think we should be able to celebrate Christmas safely,” relegating “social distancing, household mixing” to something “sooner rather than later... we’re going to have to look at.”



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact