

COVID-19 explodes in Spain as PSOE-Podemos government refuses action

Alice Summers
20 December 2021

As the more contagious Omicron variant of the coronavirus spreads rapidly across Europe, cases are rising exponentially in Spain. Average daily infections have more than quintupled in a month.

On Friday, Spain reported 33,359 new COVID-19 cases, the highest single-day total since the height of the “fourth wave” in mid-July (excluding Mondays, when cases from the weekend are also announced). On Thursday, Madrid alone saw infection numbers increase by around 6,000. Over 300,000 infections have been recorded across the country since the start of December.

Even these already catastrophic figures are likely a significant underestimate, as testing remains woefully inadequate in Spain. Only 3,121 tests are being conducted for every 100,000 members of the population, leading to a test positivity rate of 13.9 percent across the country as a whole—well above the 5 percent threshold that the World Health Organization (WHO) considers to be an indicator that the pandemic is under control.

In much of the country, this situation is even worse. Eight of Spain’s 17 regions have more than 15 percent of their tests coming back positive: Aragón (19.5 percent), the Valencia region (19.1 percent), Castilla y León (18.9 percent), Navarra (18 percent), Murcia (16.2 percent), the Basque Country (15.8 percent), La Rioja (15.5 percent) and Andalusia (15.2 percent). Only two regions have test positivity rates below 10 percent, and none are within the WHO’s 5 percent recommendation.

The rapid rise in infections in Spain is a sharp warning about the very real dangers posed by the virus, which the Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government has allowed to spread unchecked. The PSOE-Podemos coalition has engaged in a criminal and concerted

campaign to downplay the risks of COVID-19 in recent months, justifying its refusal to take any measures to contain infections with the claim that vaccination had rendered the disease relatively benign.

This “vaccine-only” strategy, pursued by governments across the world, has facilitated mass circulation of the virus, encouraging the emergence of more contagious and vaccine-resistant variants and leading to the current unfolding catastrophe of the Omicron strain.

Deaths have continued to rise in Spain, with the average daily number of fatalities more than doubling in a month—up from around 20 a day in mid-November to about 50 people now. In the last week alone, 327 people have died from the virus, including 103 last Monday. Daily fatality figures usually lag behind rising infections by around two weeks, meaning this latest increase in cases will not be reflected in the death statistics until around the end of December.

As of Monday, 7,501 people were in hospital with COVID-19, with 1,442 in Intensive Care Units (ICUs). This has nearly tripled in a month. Although a smaller proportion of all cases end up in hospital, due to widespread vaccination, those hospitalized appear to be getting more seriously ill. Around 20 percent of all hospitalizations currently end up in ICUs, according to Álvaro Castellanos, president of the Spanish Society of Intensive Medicine, up from approximately 10 percent during the rest of the pandemic.

Even though the Omicron variant has only recently begun to spread in Spain, incidence rates are already exploding. The 14-day incidence rate reached 609 per 100,000 people on Monday, having skyrocketed up from the low of 40.52 per 100,000 recorded only two months ago in mid-October. It has taken only eleven days for the incidence to roughly double, up from 305

per 100,000 on 9 December.

According to the government's own framework, any rate above 500 puts the country in a situation of "high risk," the maximum risk level. This in itself is a significant downplaying of the dangers posed by the virus: in mid-November, the PSOE-Podemos coalition doubled this threshold from 250 to 500 per 100,000, supposedly in response to the decreased risks posed by COVID-19 now that a large proportion of the Spanish population is vaccinated.

The nationwide figures obscure the real impact that the pandemic is having in some areas of Spain, with more than half the country's regions recording incidence rates above or significantly above 609. The northern region of Navarra has so far been worst affected, recording a staggeringly high incidence rate of 1,394 per 100,000. It is followed by the Basque Country (1,124), La Rioja (960), Aragón (938), Castilla y León (842), the Valencia region (668), Asturias (658), Murcia (651), the Madrid region (651) and the Balearic Islands (613).

Yet despite the explosion in cases, the PSOE-Podemos government is refusing to take any action to combat the deadly disease and has continued to insist that vaccination alone will be enough to combat the current tsunami of infections. "It is true that this new wave of expansion of the virus has very different characteristics and affects us in very different circumstances," PSOE Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez told a conference of the party's Catalan branch in Barcelona on Sunday.

"With notably higher contagion figures," he continued, "we have lower hospitalization and intensive care occupation than a year ago. The first conclusion is that vaccination works, and that this health crisis can only be stopped with science."

Sánchez's response to the pandemic has nothing in common with a scientific strategy to combat the virus, which would involve social distancing measures, the shutdown of non-essential business, isolation of all infected cases and the putting in place of a mass testing and tracing infrastructure, in addition to vaccination.

While making impotent warnings about the "real and certain health risk" posed by the Omicron variant, Sánchez proposed no measures to protect Spain's population from this danger, other than a vague statement that the government would "evaluate new

measures that could be introduced in the coming weeks." The prime minister has convened a meeting of regional presidents this Wednesday to discuss the pandemic.

The "vaccine-only" strategy of the ruling elite is fully supported by the pseudo-left. In its online publication *Izquierda Diario*, the Morenoite Workers' Revolutionary Current (CRT) has agitated against necessary public health measures throughout the pandemic, denouncing social-distancing restrictions as "authoritarian and palliative."

In one of their rare pieces on the pandemic, the CRT denounces the decision of the Catalan government to reimpose a mandatory 10-day self-isolation period for those who have been in close contact with a confirmed coronavirus case, a basic public health measure.

"Once again, the prevention of the risk of infection is proceeding through restrictive measures," the article states. "In this case, too, [it is] during the most significant days of the year [as we approach Christmas], instead of encouraging vaccination as the most effective prevention measure within communities which have not yet been vaccinated."

The concern of the PSOE, Podemos and their pseudo-left satellites like the CRT is to ensure that profits keep flowing into the coffers of the financial elite, whatever the cost in health and lives. This is incompatible with a scientifically guided program to end the pandemic worldwide and to prevent millions more deaths. Workers must take matters into their own hands, building independent safety committees in workplaces and schools to fight the spread of the disease, and developing sections of the ICFI in Spain, across Europe and internationally.



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