

As Omicron surges in Europe, governments prepare holiday catastrophe

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Following Omicron's emergence as the dominant strain in the United Kingdom, Scandinavia and Portugal, the vaccine-resistant variant is quickly engulfing Western and Central Europe. In many countries, officially-recorded infections have doubled in a few days, as Omicron is set to become the dominant strain in Europe before the new year.

Despite an explosion of cases of the vaccine-resistant variant, European governments are refusing to take any significant action to reduce transmission.

Many politicians in fact actively encouraged the European population to gather with family and friends. Yesterday, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson told the population that "people can go ahead with their Christmas plans." French President Emmanuel Macron told those "who will have the joy of being with their families for Christmas" only to take a reassurance rapid test and then follow "barrier gestures" for social distancing with family and friends. Yesterday, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez stated, "this is not March 2020 or last year's Christmas."

In contrast, World Health Organisation (WHO)-Europe chief Hans Kluge warned Tuesday of "another storm coming," adding: "the sheer volume of new COVID-19 infections could lead to more hospitalizations and widespread disruption to health systems and other critical services."

Under current conditions, Christmas celebrations this year will be a mass super-spreader event. Under a barrage of misinformation from capitalist governments and media, millions of European families are being lulled into hosting events that will lead to the deaths of tens of thousands of loved ones. In reality, infection rates are at record highs, and sky-high caseloads mean hospitals will soon be overwhelmed all across the continent.

In Western Europe, Omicron is quickly becoming dominant. The UK is witnessing an unprecedented

explosion of the virus, with 119,789 cases reported Thursday, following 105,330 cases on Wednesday.

London is the centre of the current surge and has seen a spike in hospitalizations since mid-December. On December 20, 301 people were hospitalized with COVID-19, an 80 percent increase on the previous week.

In France, 91,608 cases were recorded on Thursday, after 84,272 cases on Wednesday, the two highest daily totals in the entire pandemic. Due to staff shortages from infection, the National Railways have begun cutting regional train services. On Thursday, the Scientific Council warned of hundreds of thousands of daily cases in January and "a possible disorganization of society from the beginning of January" as huge numbers of people are infected or in quarantine.

In Spain, cases doubled to 60,041 on December 22 from 26,568 on December 20. The Omicron variant is apparently responsible for most of the surge, going from 3 to 47 percent of cases in the space of just one week. The PSOE-Podemos government's only measure has been to mandate mandatory mask wearing outdoors.

Spanish epidemiologist Quique Bassat stated that "we need stricter and more restrictive measures which are capable of containing this uncontrolled transmission."

Portugal, where Omicron is already dominant, recorded 8,937 cases on December 22, the highest since January, and almost double the average for the last seven days. Deaths in Italy are at their highest point since May, with an average of 128 in the last seven days. The seven-day average of 27,199 for new cases is the highest since November 2020.

In Germany, cases and deaths fell slightly in the last week following a prolonged wave driven by the Delta variant. In the last three months, a staggering 16,000 Germans have died. However, the fall in Delta cases and deaths is quickly being replaced by a rapid rise of Omicron, which now is estimated to account for 30

percent of cases. On December 23, the Robert Koch Institute confirmed the first death from the Omicron variant in the country.

Omicron is already dominant in the Scandinavian countries. In Denmark, the seven-day average for cases is now over 10,000, with a record 13,057 cases recorded on December 21. In a country which has adult double vaccination rates of 96.2 percent and an adult triple vaccination rate of 46.2 percent, this shows just how devastating Omicron will be throughout Europe in the coming weeks. The seven-day average for deaths is now at its highest point since February.

In the Netherlands, what have been coined as “strict” lockdown measures by the capitalist press, have been announced until at least January 14. However, four guests will be allowed to attend another household for Christmas and New Years’ celebrations, non-essential production is continuing, and the government intends to reopen schools on January 10. Such measures will neither protect the population from the Omicron surge nor eliminate circulation of the virus.

While the impact of Omicron is already being felt in Western and Central Europe, the virus is rapidly moving East. As death and infection rates fall in those countries after a devastating Delta wave, they will be likely hit even harder by Omicron.

Since October 1, 90,000 Russians, 37,000 Ukrainians, 21,000 Romanians, 17,000 Poles, 10,000 Bulgarians, 8,000 Hungarians, 5,500 Czechs, have died of COVID-19. Nine of the top 10 countries for COVID-19 deaths per million inhabitants are Eastern European or Balkan states. The virus has thrived there on low vaccination rates, official “herd immunity” policies, and health care systems ravaged by the restoration of capitalism in the former USSR and Eastern Europe.

The Delta wave is in fact still claiming over 10,000 deaths a week in these countries. However, the Omicron variant has already been identified in Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Romania, Czechia, Hungary and all the Baltic States. It is only a matter of time before it begins to dominate there.

Although Western and Central European nations have higher vaccination rates and have begun campaigns for booster jabs, millions remain unprotected. In Eastern Europe, over 100 million people remain unvaccinated. Significantly, most children in Europe have either received only one jab or are totally unvaccinated.

With schools fully opened throughout the autumn term, the number of child hospitalizations has surged in Europe.

In France there are currently 153 children hospitalized with COVID-19, including 35 in critical care. On Wednesday it was reported that another child in the UK died from COVID-19, bringing the total to 121 deaths of under-19s since the pandemic began. Between December 1 and 16, 148 children were hospitalized in Germany, over half of whom were below 3 years old.

In contrast to the criminal inaction of European governments, health authorities in China are once again showing that stringent health measures can eliminate circulation of the virus and protect lives. In the city of Xi’an, 13 million people have been locked down after the detection of 127 infections in a round of mass testing. Such measures have repeatedly halted outbreaks in China.

As Omicron cases explode exponentially in Europe, the alarm must be sounded. The continent is on course for a health and societal crisis leaving hundreds of thousands dead from COVID-19, and many more dead due to devastated health care systems’ inability to provide care.

The capitalist class bases its health policy not on infections, deaths, or even hospital saturation, but on its ability to keep non-essential production running so that its stream of profits is uninterrupted. Thus, even in the face of a highly infectious and vaccine resistant variant, it refuses to put in place the measures necessary to defend human life.

In March 2020, wildcat strikes begun by Italian workers spread through Europe and led to the only proper lockdowns to date. Now, only a conscious mass movement of the European working class directed against the bourgeoisie and its policies of mass infection can lead to a scientific fight against the virus.



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