

Spanish authorities to cut COVID-19 reporting as cases explode

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Hundreds of thousands of people are being infected with the coronavirus every day in Spain, as the far more contagious Omicron variant fuels an unprecedented rise in cases. Daily cases have only fallen below 100,000 once since December 27, with 99,671 infections reported on December 28. On December 30, the highest ever single-day total of 161,688 was recorded. Up until this point, the largest one-day infection total in any previous wave of the pandemic had been 44,347.

Currently, over 1.8 million inhabitants of Spain are sick with COVID-19, more than a seventh of the total cases recorded in the Spain since the start of the pandemic, and roughly 4 percent of the population.

Even this is likely just the tip of the iceberg, as Spain's inadequate testing facilities have been unable to cope with the surge in infections. Test positivity rates have reached a staggering 33 percent nationwide, well above the World Health Organization's (WHO) threshold of 5 percent—considered an indicator that the pandemic is under control. In some regions, such as Navarra, more than half of all tests conducted are returning positive results.

The Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government has responded to this unfolding public health catastrophe by threatening to stop recording infection data. According to RTVE, the Spanish Ministry of Health and the regional governments are drawing up plans to change the way that COVID-19 cases are recorded, so as to focus on hospitalizations and deaths, thereby downplaying the dangers of mass infection.

RTVE explained that a new system would be implemented which would make it unnecessary for regions to record data case by case, moving instead towards the health reporting system used for other diseases like flu. "Experts" from the health ministry reportedly explained that it was "unsustainable" to

continue testing all suspected cases given the high incidence of the disease.

As of Friday, the incidence rate hit 2,722 per 100,000 in Spain, with some regions reporting rates of over 5,000 or 6,000 per 100,000.

The PSOE-Podemos government has also announced plans to scale back its contact-tracing program in light of the explosion of cases. Close contacts of confirmed coronavirus cases will only be identified by the government's track-and-trace service if they are in environments considered "high risk," such as in care homes or health centers. Infected individuals will otherwise be responsible for tracking down their own contacts and informing them of the potential risk.

The PSOE-Podemos government has made clear that it plans to take no action to protect the health and lives of the Spanish people, fully embracing the fascist policy of "herd immunity." On Friday, PSOE Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez told a meeting of the party's Federal Committee that the country "is better prepared than a year ago" to confront COVID-19 and insisted that "we are going to have to learn to live with it like we do with many other viruses."

Admitting that his policy had no scientific basis, Sánchez then proceeded to double down on his government's vaccine-only strategy: "While we are waiting for science to tell us if this variant is more or less harmful, what we do know is that vaccination protects us more against contagion and against the severe illness."

Sánchez's demand that the population "learn to live with the virus" is an open acknowledgement of what has long been the PSOE-Podemos administration's policy. The ruling class intends to let the virus run rampant throughout the entire population, no matter the cost in health and lives, so as not to infringe on the

profits of big business and the banks.

For this reason, the Spanish government has insisted that all children return to in-person schooling on Monday, January 10, in order to allow parents to continue working in unsafe factories, offices and other workplaces to generate profits for the companies.

Next to no measures will be in place to ensure the safety of teachers, pupils and their families, other than that children and educators should wear masks and regularly wash their hands, and that classrooms should be well ventilated. These vague instructions will be completely ineffective under conditions in which the virus is circulating massively throughout the Spanish population.

In a statement on Tuesday, PSOE Education Minister Pilar Alegría lied about the danger of the virus, falsely claiming that children would not be at risk in schools. “Our classrooms are safe,” she stated. “Choosing in-person [schooling] is the best option. It guarantees the right of education in conditions of equality and equity.” Alegría said nothing of the right of children and their families to not be infected with a serious and potentially deadly disease.

On Friday, the Health Ministry then announced that school classrooms would no longer have to quarantine if COVID-19 cases are detected, unless there are at least five infections among their members, or at least 20 percent of the pupils.

This follows an earlier decision by the PSOE-Podemos government at the end of December to reduce quarantine time for the population as a whole from 10 days to seven for asymptomatic cases. A negative PCR test will not be required to end the quarantine period.

Meanwhile, hospitals are nearing collapse as the virus surges through health care staff and the population more broadly. Infections of health workers have roughly quadrupled in a month, up from 1,024 in the last week of November to 3,952 in the last week of December. This is nearly three times more than during the “fifth wave” in July and August, which peaked at 1,378 health care worker infections in a single week.

In the Basque Country, one of the worst hit regions so far, the Satse nursing union estimates that between 4 and 7 percent of health care workers are currently off sick with the coronavirus. The Basque Health Service (Osakidetza) has been forced to draw up lists of volunteers to cover shifts. Hospitalizations have

increased by 76 percent since December 20 in this region, while ICU admissions have increased by 30 percent.

Health care workers are being forced to deal with skyrocketing hospitalizations, with 14,426 people in hospital as of January 7, more than at any point since mid-February last year, during Spain’s catastrophic “third wave.” This is an increase of roughly a third in a week. Over 2,000 people are currently in Intensive Care Units (ICUs) with COVID-19, the highest number since the peak of the “fifth wave” at the start of August. This number is also rapidly rising, increasing by around 13 percent over the last seven days.

The Spanish and international ruling class’s prioritization of profits over lives is incompatible with a scientifically guided fight against the virus. Only a conscious mass movement of the Spanish, European and global working class directed against the bourgeoisie and its policies of mass infection can end the pandemic and save lives.



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