

French COVID-19 deaths reach highest level since the winter of 2021

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In the past week France has recorded over 650 daily deaths on two occasions. On February 8, 691 deaths were recorded. On February 10, 655 further deaths were reported. The 7-day average of 324 daily deaths is the highest figure since April 1, when just 4.4 percent of the French population was fully vaccinated against the virus, compared to over 77 percent today.

Despite a level of death that has not been seen for almost a year and one of the highest of the entire pandemic, there has been no mention of the figure in any of the major French newspapers or by the government.

The rise in deaths in the country has occurred after five consecutive weeks where daily infections have averaged over 100,000. Although average cases are now falling from the peak of 365,000 on January 26, the 7-day average is still above 100,000. Since Omicron became dominant in France on December 31, 2021, 11.5 million people have been infected in the country. This means that in a little over a month there have been more infections than the rest of the pandemic combined.

Citing the fall in cases, the Macron government is moving to remove all restrictions against COVID-19, as has already been done in Denmark and the UK. From February 28, masks will no longer be required in most indoor settings. On February 12, the requirement to present a recent negative test result upon arrival into France was also removed for vaccinated travelers.

According to Junior Minister of Transportation Jean Baptiste Djebbari, the end of the requirement to wear masks on public transport will be discussed at this week's Defense Council meeting.

The explosion of infections since mid-December shows that the health measures taken by the French government were never sufficient to protect the population. However, the end of even the most minimal public health measures will allow the virus to spread further throughout the population and allow for surges of other variants and

Omicron sub-lineages known to be widely circulating in France, across Europe and internationally.

Beyond the current level of death, such high levels of infection are a catastrophe for millions condemned to live with the long-term consequences of COVID-19. The experience from sufferers of Long COVID from the first wave of the pandemic shows that millions will suffer from at least shortness of breath, brain fog and fatigue.

Unfortunately, thousands who survived the initial symptoms of COVID-19 will likely meet an early end in the coming year. Fatal diseases are more common among individuals who have survived COVID-19 infection in the previous 12 months. One recent study found that individuals with a confirmed COVID-19 infection were 63 percent more likely to suffer from 20 cardiovascular diseases, including strokes and heart attacks, in the 12 months after infection.

While such high levels of infection have created a limited amount of "natural" protection against the virus, this is far outweighed by the cost of the mass infection policy. Over the past 2 months alone, there have been 15,000 preventable deaths, in addition to the millions who will suffer from the long-term consequences of COVID-19 infection.

Furthermore, the "protection" gained will not shield the population against further waves driven by newer variants. Such massive rates of infection in France and worldwide entail high rates of mutation in the virus. Newer variants that evade both natural and vaccine-induced immunity more effectively than Omicron will inevitably spread throughout the population, undermining whatever protection has been gained.

Unvaccinated school children are at particular risk from long-term complications of the virus. They are the least vaccinated group in society and have borne the brunt of the most recent wave. In the most recent data from French public health agency, in the week beginning January 31,

among 10- to 19-year-olds the incidence rate was 3,954 per 100,000 (the highest of any age group), and among 0 to 9-year-olds it was 2,707. More than 90 percent of French children under 12 remain unprotected, even though child vaccinations started in early December 2021.

Nevertheless, the Macron government is determined to extend its purge of any last COVID-19 measures to schools. A new COVID-19 protocol will come into effect beginning February 21.

Now children and staff will only be required to show a negative self-test on Day 2 of isolation to return to classrooms. Parents will also no longer be required to pledge that their child has taken a test at all. Relying on single self-tests, which are notoriously unreliable and unfit for tracking and tracing cases, and effectively eliminating the testing rules mean French classrooms will be flooded with even larger numbers of children testing positive for COVID-19.

Macron has only been able to enforce such a murderous policy in schools due to the criminal role played by the so-called teachers unions. Acting as a police force throughout the pandemic, they isolated and extinguished all eruptions of struggle by rank-and-file teachers while enforcing each intensification of the government's herd immunity policy in the schools and universities. The most recent protocol was only announced by Education Minister Jean-Michel Blanquer after it was signed off by the teachers unions in a closed-door meeting on February 8.

In the last two months alone, hundreds of thousands of French children have been infected with COVID-19. A whole generation has been condemned to struggle with the long-term effects of a virus which damages vital organs. Preliminary evidence indicates COVID-19 infection increases the risk of diabetes in children. The true extent of these long-term effects will only become clear over a period of years and decades.

The mass infection policy pursued by the Macron government and its counterparts throughout Europe will go down in history as a great social crime.

For most of the pandemic, governments across Europe pursued a mitigation strategy, which the WSWS has described as "an amorphous collection of measures that tries to negotiate between the realities of the virus and the financial interests of the ruling elites." Seizing on the false pretext that Omicron variant is "milder," this has shifted to an open policy of herd immunity in the past two months.

France is one of the most extreme examples of the

consequences of this shift, as not a finger was raised by the government in response to eye-watering daily case figures that reached 500,000. Infections have been so high that even among a highly vaccinated population, serious illness and death have reached levels seen before mass inoculation was possible.

As far as the French and European ruling class is concerned, even limited health measures must be avoided at all costs. From here on in, in the face of new surges and more dangerous variants they intend to tolerate no barrier to the extraction of profit from the working class.

The French ruling class has been united in its response to the fascist-organized and -led "Freedom Convoy" that tried to occupy Paris on Saturday. Although this small movement was easily quashed by Paris police, its demands for the end of measures against COVID-19 were sympathetically welcomed by all sections of the ruling class and its representatives, from fascist presidential candidate Eric Zemmour to pseudoleft candidate Jean Luc Mélenchon. Macron himself described their calls for a policy of mass infection as "legitimate."

The working class in France and across Europe must not accept wave after wave and year after year of mass death. The collapse of the mitigation strategy pursued by the European ruling class underscores the urgent need to build rank-and-file workers committees across France and internationally, fighting to implement a scientific policy to eradicate the virus and save millions of lives. This entails a frontal assault on the privileges of the capitalist class and a break from its political servants in the unions and pseudoleft parties.



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