

PSOE-Podemos ends COVID-19 mitigations forcing Spanish workers to stay on the job sick

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Spain's Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government is dismantling all remaining COVID-19 mitigation measures, as Omicron BA.2 surges throughout Europe. It is ending even the most basic aspects of monitoring, setting the stage for a new surge whose full extent will not be known until hospitalizations and deaths begin to rise.

The homicidal disregard for the lives and health of society is laid bare with the latest announcement that possibly infected workers should still go to work. Since March 28, quarantines are only mandatory for serious cases and those classified as part of the high-risk or vulnerable population. This includes those over age 60 years, immuno-compromised people and pregnant women. Workers will be forced back to work, even if they suspect they may have COVID-19, putting their colleagues and their families at risk.

The policy aims to satisfy growing demands from the financial aristocracy. Last January, the president of the Madrid Business Confederation (CEIM), Miguel Garrido, demanded that the quarantine period be reduced to four days for the asymptomatic. He complained that workers on sick leave are “many and long-lasting, some overlap with others and end up collapsing company activity. “In February, his counterpart Ángel Nicolás of the Confederation of Castilla-La Mancha Businessmen (Cecam) denounced the practice of “giving sick days automatically.”

The PSOE-Podemos government is also attacking the monitoring of the pandemic. Tests will not be carried out on possibly infected people or contacts, except for those over 60, pregnant or immunosuppressed. Only serious cases are to be counted in official statistics.

This is an anti-scientific campaign to cover up mass

infection. It is part of the PSOE-Podemos' plan to create a “new normal” of continuous mass infection and death with COVID-19, which it calls the *gripalización* (influenza-ization) of COVID-19.

Indoor masking, the only relevant measure that remains in force, will be removed from April 20 onwards, coinciding with Easter break, a holiday season that has a track record of increasing COVID-19 cases.

The criminal policy was laid out by government chief scientist, Fernando Simón, director of the Center for Alerts and Emergencies, supposedly in charge of protecting human life. During the XXI Conference on Vaccines and Public Health held Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Simón said, “the situation is beginning to improve,” and therefore “we cannot continue as we were.” Defending the ending of mitigation measures, he demanded Spaniards “take on a bit more risk.”

Simón made clear that PSOE-Podemos intends to pursue mass infection. He stated, “we cannot eliminate the circulation of the virus unless we get slightly better vaccines.” For this reason, he admitted, “we must assume that there is going to be a new one [new wave].” Covid, he added, cannot be an “excuse” for not returning to normal health care activity: “We must take a step forward and recover assistance because there are many people who have suffered a lot.”

This is a pack of lies. Simón is providing pseudo-scientific justification for ending all COVID-19 mitigation, which is the polar opposite of the “dynamic zero” strategy pursued in China, which has stamped out repeated outbreaks and reduced deaths to only two people since May 2020—in a country of 1.4 billion. China is now the only major country still fighting for a

Zero-COVID strategy and is presently battling its worst outbreak since the start of the pandemic due to the BA.2 variant, with a record of over 20,000 infections reported on Tuesday.

The claim that the aim of this policy is to relieve the public health system is even more fraudulent. The health care system is overwhelmed, with waiting times of weeks for primary care attention, appointments for tests or specialist care. But this is because the PSOE and Podemos are slashing health care spending.

Totally inadequate public health spending was a problem long before the pandemic, which only aggravated the situation. The underlying problems in Spanish public health are fundamentally related to its progressive privatization and lack of resources. In fact, thousands of health workers hired as reinforcements against COVID-19 are being fired, and primary care now has 1,000 fewer doctors than before the pandemic.

Madrid announced it was not renewing the contracts of 6,000 health workers who worked on the front-lines during the COVID-19 pandemic. They have found themselves unemployed since the end of March.

Enrique Revilla, a family doctor and spokesman for *Medicus Mundi*, said: “There is a lack of resources, doctors, nurses. We are in a state of collapse.” In a recent report, the Ombudsman indicated that primary care shows “the saturation of services, as occurs at the level of specialized and hospital care, all of which are factors that have undermined the quality of our health system.”

The PSOE-Podemos government’s priorities are not in saving lives, but in supporting the military machine and bailing out the rich. It is currently disbursing billions of European Union bailout funds to major Spanish corporations and banks, while planning to pump over 14 billion euros into military spending, and is sending its fourth shipment of weapons to Ukraine. Much of this is ending in the hands of the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion.

At the same time, the PSOE and Podemos are mounting a propaganda campaign insisting that the pandemic is over. Days before Simón’s statements, Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez cynically claimed Spain is moving towards a “horizon ... of overcoming the pandemic.”

These statements are contradicted by the data. In March, 516,000 people were infected with 2,728 deaths

in Spain. The last real data available before the change in the way of counting infections indicated an upward incidence in the last two weeks, which was 466 per 100,000 on March 29. In that same period in China, there were only 40,000 infections and two deaths despite a major outbreak of infections that affected more than 30 cities.

Worldwide, March has been the third worst month since 2020 with 51 million infections, and a very strong increase in those infected in countries that have recently abandoned strong mitigation strategies, such as South Korea with 10 million and Vietnam with 6 million, or that have eliminated virus containment measures, such as Germany with another 6 million. These data clearly show that the pandemic, far from being overcome, is surging in many countries.

Ultimately, the policy of mass infection is about protecting business profits before lives. The catastrophic loss of life provoked by the government’s policy of “herd immunity” strategy of mass infection is unprecedented in Spanish history since the three-year Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) over 80 years ago which costs the lives of around 500,000 people.

According to the latest data of *The Lancet*, Spain’s excess mortality due to COVID-19 is now 162,000. It has provoked 12 million infections and an estimated 1 million Long-COVID cases. Meanwhile, Spain’s corporations recorded record profits of more than €53 billion in 2021.

The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers, scientists and anti-COVID-19 activists in Spain and throughout the world to uncover and document the disastrous response to the pandemic by providing testimony to the Global Workers’ Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic.



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