

Brazilian government announces fraudulent end of pandemic

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On April 17, the government of fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro announced the end of the health emergency decree that began in February 2020, making official the turn to scrap all restrictions on the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil.

In a nationally televised speech, after admitting that the world is still “facing the greatest health emergency in history,” and pretending to mourn “the victims and those who still suffer as a result of the sequelae of this disease,” Health Minister Marcelo Queiroga hypocritically said that “with the strength of the Unified Health System (SUS), we saved many lives.”

The criminal implications of the Bolsonaro administration’s new decree were raised by epidemiologist Ethel Maciel at a discussion hosted by the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz). Maciel stated: “We need to strengthen the capacity of epidemiological teams and laboratories. The great concern with revoking the [health emergency] decree is that these structures will be closed.”

Together with the end of mask mandates in all Brazilian states and the prevalence of the Omicron BA.2 subvariant in the country, the Brazilian government’s decision to end the health emergency can cause a new outbreak, as is now happening in the US, the UK and other countries.

On April 14, the All for Health Institute (ITpS) reported that the highly transmissible BA.2 subvariant accounted for almost 70 percent of COVID-19 cases. Less than a month ago, on March 19, 27.2 percent of the positive tests reported were from the subvariant.

In light of this, several scientists and health experts have warned of the implications of ending the emergency decree.

On April 7, it was confirmed that the Butantan Institute found the first case of the Omicron subvariant XE in Brazil, which combines characteristics of BA.1 and BA.2. On the 16th, the first case of recombination of the Delta

and Omicron variants was confirmed in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. Richard Steiner Salvato, a specialist from the state’s genomic surveillance agency, stressed the importance of continuing to monitor the trajectory of these variants. Salvato said, “The case identified here has additional mutations, which does not allow us to know what impacts this recombination brings to the behavior of the virus.”

Nésio Fernandes, president of the National Council of Health Secretaries (CONASS), told the *Piauí* magazine: “With the cuts and the discontinuing of these investments, there will be a great demobilization of ICU beds.” According to him, the Unified Health System did not collapse in February, during the Omicron wave, only because it maintained these beds, which will now be decommissioned.

Epidemiologist Marcia Castro from Harvard University emphasized to *Piauí* the great regional inequality in vaccination and the fact that less than 40 percent of the Brazilian population has taken the first booster shot: “We still have many people not vaccinated, the number of cases is increasing in Europe, we have environments where the ventilation conditions are terrible. This message that ‘it’s over’ is very concerning.”

The ruling class campaign to demobilize all efforts to contain the virus is based on the narrative that, after repeated waves of SARS-CoV-2 and the spread of the supposedly “mild” Omicron variant, the pandemic is becoming “endemic.” The term has been used by governments around the world as they declare an end to all control measures, and cut the resources needed to carry out treatment of patients with COVID-19.

A critical element of this “herd immunity” policy is to cut funding for testing centers, effectively eliminating the ability to predict the trajectory of the virus and prepare any kind of response, while also hiding the real severity of the pandemic from the population.

In the United States, where mandatory masking on public transportation was dropped last week, the Biden administration has cut funding for free testing and vaccines for uninsured people, while criteria are being drawn up that remove tens of thousands of deaths from the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) count.

In the UK, Boris Johnson's government ended free test distribution earlier this month, and other critical measures in the fight against the virus have been dropped since February 24, such as requiring self-isolation for people who test positive. The real impact of BA.2 in the country is being seen in the near-record number of hospitalizations and almost 2,300 deaths in the last seven days.

In Brazil, on December 10, after a hacker attack on the Health Ministry website brought down the counting of new cases, deaths and vaccinations, Bolsonaro redoubled his offensive against any remaining mitigation measures and against the implementation of vaccination certificates to control the entry of people from outside the country before the New Year and carnival holidays.

In December, with the impending approval of the vaccination of children ages 5 to 11, Bolsonaro incited violence against technicians of the Brazilian Health Regulatory Agency (Anvisa), responsible for the decision, and threatened to force parents to obtain a medical prescription to vaccinate their children. The federal government delayed the childhood vaccination campaign for weeks, while the governors, including of the self-declared left, declared unanimously that they would not postpone the mandatory return to schools.

After the Omicron variant wave receded in January-February, state governors, some of whom had been pushing for an end to mandatory masking indoors since October, joined Bolsonaro's efforts and ended mask mandates in March.

In the face of the campaign to allow the virus to spread and the recent announcement of the end of the health emergency, the true meaning of the "endemic" narrative becomes clear: the population must accept a "new normal" of mass infections, deaths, and suffering with long COVID.

The Bolsonaro administration and governors of every political party represent the interests of the Brazilian bourgeoisie, which sees the remaining mitigation measures as an unwelcome reminder that the pandemic is not over. Their goal is to ensure that workers remain in workplaces, even if infected, to maximize profits for big business.

It is necessary to oppose these measures, which lack any scientific basis. The history of the past two years shows that continued large-scale infection risks the emergence of new variants with increased virulence and resistance to vaccines. The COVID-19 pandemic will not end by decree, but only through a policy of global elimination of the new coronavirus.

The actions of the governors of the Workers Party (PT), who carried out economic and school reopenings hand in hand with Bolsonaro, show that the election of a new government of former President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva will not provide an alternative to fight the pandemic, and indeed any of the urgent problems confronting the Brazilian working class.

In April 2020, while Bolsonaro reaffirmed that no public health response should be implemented to fight the pandemic, Congress approved, with the support of all major parties, including the PT caucus, a multi-billion bailout package for big business, while a fraction of that amount was directed to providing limited economic aid to working people.

In opposition to the death policy of capitalist governments around the world, the working class must build rank-and-file committees as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), with the collaboration of scientists and public health experts to implement all necessary measures to end the pandemic.

On May 1, the International Committee of the Fourth International will present a program to counter the strategy of war and death of the ruling class with a program for the elimination of the pandemic and ending the imperialist war being waged in Ukraine. We urge all workers in Brazil and internationally to attend this critical event.



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