Macron to dismantle last remaining anti-COVID health measures in France

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During a cabinet meeting on May 4, French president Emmanuel Macron announced, according to *Libération*, “some adaptations in the coming weeks” to the measures still in place against COVID-19. Macron intends to end “the obligatory wearing of masks on public transport, obligatory self-isolation after a positive Covid test, and compulsory vaccination for health care workers under pain of suspension.” This would amount to the ending of the last remaining restrictions on the spread of the virus.

In the middle of March, before the presidential elections, Macron had already abandoned the health pass that certifies vaccination status, and also the general wearing of face masks, excepting public transport and health and public establishments.

In carrying out his policy, Macron relied on unanimous support from the established political parties, none of whose candidates in France’s recent presidential election challenged his policy on the pandemic, or proposed a scientifically-based policy to combat the virus.

A resurgence of the pandemic linked to the extremely contagious Omicron variant then followed in April, after the relaxing of measures taken in March.

In France as elsewhere internationally, the ruling class has systematically operated a policy of profits before lives. The pseudo-left parties and trade unions totally lined up behind this policy in every country, thus working to suppress working class opposition to a policy of mass infection.

The various countries are in a race to the bottom in abandoning public health measures. Only China is still carrying out a “Zero-COVID” policy, which faces serious opposition from economic quarters and western leaders, with the official media pouring venomous hostility on China’s policy. The NATO proxy war in Ukraine has been a pretext to avoid virtually any further discussion of the pandemic.

In France, in preparation for completely terminating the fight against COVID-19, Macron declared during the election campaign: “We are going, I think, to exit the acute epidemic phase (…) If we continue in this direction, we are going to experience an endemic phase.”

The reference to “endemic” is totally misleading. Endemicity refers only to the habitual presence of a disease in a region or a specific population. That has nothing to do with the health policy undertaken to deal with the disease itself.

Macron wants to exploit the fall in case rates to argue that COVID-19 will circulate at a low level, with no requirement needed for any specific measures.

The COVID reproduction rate (R0) has indeed fallen below 1 after mid-April, which means the number of cases has been falling regularly for a month. But the level of cases remains high; it has only recently dropped below 50,000, and that is not taking into account the asymptomatic cases, which increasingly are not detected. The level of hospital admissions remains above 20,000. More than 1,000 people are hospitalized every day and more than 100 are taken into intensive care.

The mortality rate remains at a very high and uneven plateau, with over 100 deaths per day since the fall in the mortality rate from COVID at the end of February.

It is not at all certain that France will experience a significant and enduring fall in the number of deaths, especially if the remaining precautionary measures are lifted and a climate of risk denial is deliberately encouraged. The end of masking in mass transit and in health and public establishments would be especially catastrophic.

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Once again, measures to combat the virus are being dismantled at the moment when a policy of elimination could be put in place. The consequence is a catastrophic recrudescence of the epidemic.

Again, there is speculation about a possible “herd immunity” to obviate the need to combat COVID. This would be obtained through a high vaccination coverage reinforced by tens of millions of people contaminated by Omicron.

But the effects of the vaccination campaign and booster shots will soon diminish, as studies have shown that the vaccine protection falls rapidly for the Omicron variant. Mortality will therefore inevitably increase. There will again be more serious cases and deaths for the same number of contaminated people, to the extent that the vaccination campaign has stalled and that only 59 percent of the population has had a booster shot.

The French Scientific Council has also warned about the BA.4 and BA.5 Omicron variants which are currently provoking a fifth wave of infection in South Africa and which could provoke an epidemic wave in France at the summer’s end. These variants have already started to spread in France and other countries. They partially elude acquired immunity and vaccines.

The United States is experiencing a resurgent epidemic in connection with another Omicron variant (BA.2.12.1), which is spreading rapidly in New York state. In Europe, other than the BA.4 and BA.5, there is also the XE variant that is gaining ground, notably in the U.K and Spain.

Scientists are also warning of the fact that there is no ground for believing that COVID-19 is evolving constantly toward a more benign form. Whilst the Omicron variant imposed itself because it was more contagious, the appearance of more or less deadly forms is largely a question of chance. Allowing the unhindered spread of the virus over the greater part of the planet can result in the appearance at any moment of a deadly variant.

Epidemiologist Antoine Flahaut, professor at the Geneva Faculty of Medicine, thinks that the virus, because of the explosive character of BA.4 and BA.5 in South Africa, could trigger a new wave far earlier than thought, as soon as the first months of summer.

Flahaut also underlined that the high mortality rate in France is in part due to the underutilization of available treatments, in particular Pfizer’s Paxlovid, which the WHO has recommended in preference to other treatments.

In France, only 10,000 prescriptions have been written for the 500,000 cartons purchased. The treatment, which targets people at risk of catching a serious infection (age, excess weight, etc.) has to be administered less than five days after the appearance of the first symptoms to be effective.

It can in theory be prescribed by family doctors since February 3, 2022. But the prescription rules that are in place have all but blocked its use up until recently. This is one illustration of the indifference with which the pandemic is treated.

Macron, like his counterparts in other European countries, has decided to allow an avoidable disease to become a constant feature of daily life in France, which will probably kill tens of thousands of people every year, much more than the worst annual flu epidemics in decades past. Moreover, the pandemic threatens to create a much worse health catastrophe if a more aggressive variant appears. And deaths will be even higher, especially in countries where health systems are less developed than in the richest countries of Europe.

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