COVID-19 infections rising in Turkey as scientists warn of a new surge

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As capitalist governments all over the world except China have lifted measures against the transmission of COVID-19 and declared the pandemic over, the Omicron BA.4 and BA.5 subvariants are rapidly spreading and becoming dominant internationally.

Official figures show that the COVID-19 pandemic is on the rise again in Turkey, where the Health Ministry recently confirmed the first official case of monkeypox. According to COVID-19 data released by the Health Ministry on a delayed and weekly basis since June, 7,556 people tested positive in the week of June 6-12, 10,954 in the week of June 13-19, and 26,635 in the week of June 20-26. This represents a more than three-fold increase in three weeks.

While the lifting of the mask mandate on public transportation in May was based on the unscientific claim that the number of cases was below 1,000 for three consecutive days, it is not explained why this measure has not been reinstated, as the seven-day average of daily new cases is now almost 4,000 per day.

The significant increase in the official case figures is taking place despite the lack of widespread testing and must be taken as a serious warning by the working population. Moreover, the Ministry of Health has not disclosed the number of daily tests performed for some time, which prevents a full understanding of the seriousness of the situation. In Turkey, a country of 85 million people, the last time figures were released they showed that the number of daily tests was as low as 100,000.

Since March 11, 2020, when the first COVID-19 case was detected in Turkey, the number of official infections has reached 15.1 million, while over 99,000 people have died. However, there are various studies suggesting that the real death toll is at least three times higher than the official figure and that many millions more people have been infected.

The Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) did not release the "Death and Cause of Death Statistics" for 2020, 2021 and 2022, which should have been released on June 24, according to the National Data Release Calendar. According to calculations made by Güçlü Yaman, a member of the Turkish Medical Association (TTB) Pandemic Working Group, however, excess deaths during the pandemic have reached 288,000.

Making clear that no public health measures will be implemented by the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an, Health Minister Fahrettin Koca recently stated, "It is important for those at risk to pay attention to personal precautions. Although the number of cases has more than tripled in the last two weeks, in contrast, the hospital load continues to decrease. The bad days are behind us."

From the outset, the Erdo?an government, like its counterparts around the world, has acted not according to public health experts and scientists, but according to the profit interests of the ruling class. Treasury and Finance Minister Nureddin Nebati recently summarized the "system" that has led to hundreds of thousands of deaths and tens of millions of people being infected, as well as the relentless exploitation of the working class, stating, "Producers and exporters profit from this system, except for low-income people. The wheels are turning."

The share of corporations in national income has risen from 42.9 to 47 percent in the last two years of the pandemic, while the total wealth of Turkey's millionaires has reached 3.9 trillion Turkish liras. In contrast, 90 percent of the population consisting of the working class and lower-middle class live below the poverty line and are getting poorer.

The official annual inflation rate is now over 70 percent, as the cost of living is skyrocketing. However, the Inflation Research Group (ENAG), an independent agency, calculates that real annual inflation is already

over 160 percent.

Amid the Erdo?an government's policy of mass infection and death, scientists and public health experts warn that the Omicron BA.4 and BA.5 subvariants have unleashed a new wave of infection and death on a global scale. On June 21, Professor Mehmet Ceyhan from Hacettepe University in Ankara pointed out that there has been an increase in applications to hospitals due to COVID-19, underlining that the BA.4 and BA.5 subvariants of Omicron are transmitted very quickly.

He added, "We are not aware of the increase in cases because the conditions for testing in Turkey have been made very difficult. There is no budget for pandemics anymore. The pandemic is being treated as if it does not exist."

Dr. Esin Davuto?lu ?enol, an infectious diseases specialist, said, "There is an increase in the number of deaths in the world. There is an uptrend due to new variants... Masks should be mandatory in public transportation vehicles and closed areas." She also drew attention to the decline in immunity provided by vaccination to the new Omicron subvariants.

Dr. ?ftihar Köksal, an infectious diseases and microbiology specialist, commented on why the government has stopped announcing the number of infections, stating, "Cases and hospitalizations are increasing. Since the [Health] Ministry lifted the restrictions and did not make any announcement, citizens think that COVID is over. But it is not over and there is a significant increase in cases."

Dr. Meral Sönmezo?lu from Yeditepe University Hospitals Infectious Diseases and Clinical Microbiology added, "People are getting tested less. People who come with complaints such as respiratory tract infections and fever are all COVID." She added, "When we look at the [daily case] numbers, it reached the numbers in January and February. It was too hasty to abolish the mask mandate in closed areas." This mandate was removed at the end of April.

Dr. Sönmezo?lu concluded, "The World Health Organization (WHO) decided on the pandemic. WHO did not [stop calling it] a pandemic, but our country accepted the pandemic is over. There are cases in the world. Indonesia and Turkey do not report cases to WHO. Because tourism is the only income expectation."

Alongside the danger of a new surge, complaints of Long COVID symptoms are on the rise. Studies, especially in the US, estimate that Long COVID, or Post Acute Coronavirus Syndrome (PACS), affects nearly 10-30 percent of those infected. Symptoms can include abnormal heart rhythms, muscle and joint pains, kidney failure, blood clot disorders, stroke, diabetes, anxiety and other forms of neurological and mental health dysfunction.

On June 20, a Twitter user named An?l ?lerigider, who lives in Germany and presents himself as a biotechnologist, wrote: "My coworker who was infected with #Omicron (most likely BA.4/5) at the beginning of June with 3 doses of vaccine suddenly started losing his/her hair. Followed by terrible headache & toothache, gum recession and inflammation, his/her two teeth fell out. My coworker was devastated." He then asked, "Have any of you been similarly sick?" and received many responses.

One response states, "I am 57 years old, I had COVID in March and now I have what you wrote and high blood pressure." Another user wrote, "I was infected at the beginning of the pandemic. I did not recover for three months. I still have pain in my eyes and some visual impairment." A third noted, "I was tested positive while I was vaccinated with two doses. I had brain fog and a noticeable decrease in my perception."

Another commenter wrote, "My tooth enamel became thinner and 2-3 of my teeth were broken." A fifth person added, "I was vaccinated with three doses when I was infected with COVID in mid-February. It was mild, but lung damage remained. Hair loss, forgetfulness and distraction are very high (even now)."

Even these brief testimonies underscore the importance of the *World Socialist Web Site*'s Global Workers' Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic and the need for its dissemination among the international working class. We urge all our readers to support the Inquiry and to watch and share the WSWS video "What must be done to end the pandemic."

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