

Greek government moves to weekly COVID reporting as cases and deaths surge

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Over the past eight weeks Greece has been experiencing a surge of COVID-19 cases, part of the wider wave of infections raging across Europe and internationally fuelled by the highly contagious BA.5 Omicron sub-variant.

Latest figures released by the National Organisation for Public Health (EODY) showed 136,077 recorded new cases over the previous week, an average of 19,439 new cases a day, over five times higher than the corresponding figures at the beginning of June.

The surge in Greece is down to the premature lifting of virtually all public health measures in anticipation of the summer tourist season. This began in May with the scrapping of the proof of vaccination requirement to enter restaurants, bars and cafes, which were allowed to operate at full capacity. People travelling into Greece also no longer had to show proof of vaccination to enter the country.

In June measures were further relaxed, as mask mandates was lifted everywhere apart from healthcare settings and public transport. At the beginning of this month, as a further boost to the tourist industry, the conservative New Democracy government exempted hotels from providing special quarantine accommodation for tourists testing positive for the virus, who are no longer required to adhere to the already short five-day isolation period required for anyone testing positive within Greece.

These policies are part of the herd immunity agenda pursued by governments worldwide at the behest of the global financial elite, which sees all public health measures that cut across profits as unacceptable.

The sharp climb of cases has prompted calls from within the scientific and medical community for the re-introduction of public health measures to curb the spread of the virus.

These were dismissed by medical doctor and epidemiologist Gkikas Magiorkinis, who sits on the body of public health experts advising the government on COVID-19. In a Facebook post on July 5 he wrote, “Every time we have a coronavirus surge we hear ‘voices’ calling for the taking of measures... Taking NPI’s [non pharmaceutical interventions] mainly flattens the curve, it doesn’t dramatically reduce the number of infections in the long term given that with the reversal of NPI’s, which sooner or later must happen, we immediately see an upsurge until we achieve a temporary wall of immunity which will lead the upsurge to recede.”

Magiorkinis is one of many public health scientists to provide a scientific veneer to the notion that herd immunity is the inevitable course that the pandemic must run. But when NPIs are lifted has never been dictated by public health but by the profit requirements of the financial aristocracy. China’s pursuit of a zero-COVID policy has shown that infections can be brought down and contained.

Speaking to the *World Socialist Web Site*, neuroscientist and zero-COVID campaigner Spyros Merkouris (@covid19gr) said, “It is crystal clear that the Greek government is adopting all the core arguments of COVID deniers. This strategy aims at preventing workers who test positive from requesting absence from work or long haulers to seek support. The Greek government, as every capitalist government, considers the workers dispensable machines that only exist to make the rich richer. Zero COVID strategies are the only way forward but unfortunately there is no support from any political power in Greece.”

Having ruled out the adoption of any public health measures, the government now only reports weekly on coronavirus cases, hospitalisations and deaths, instead

of daily. This follows the lead of governments across Europe such as France, Italy, Spain and the UK.

EODY's switch to weekly reporting is aimed at concealing the fact that the virus is being allowed to run rampant. It announced the move on July 8 even as it admitted that there is a surge "in almost all European countries," while "the course of the pandemic in our country is displaying an upward trend for approximately the last four weeks." This was written off with the excuse that "the number of cases is a direct function of the testing policies in each country" and "Greece is the third [highest] country in the European Union with regard to the daily number of Covid-19 tests conducted."

In other words, there are too many cases because there is too much testing! This backwards logic, first advanced by Donald Trump, is based on a lie. On the day the statement was released, the rate of positive COVID tests in Greece was 16.88 percent, nearly double that at the beginning of June. This has long since been surpassed. The positivity rate, still reported on daily, has been over 20 percent for the past three days, refuting claims by Health Minister Thanos Plevris in an interview on *Open TV* Tuesday that cases had been dropping for over a week.

As Merkouris commented on Twitter, "Before they peddle to you that cases reduced by 9.4 percent let us note that the number of tests conducted were reduced by 8.5 percent."

Mehring Books, the publishing arm of the Socialist Equality Party (US), is proud to announce the publication in epub format of Volume 1 of *COVID, Capitalism, and Class War: A Social and Political Chronology of the Pandemic*, a compilation of the *World Socialist Web Site's* coverage of this global crisis.

The second falsehood in the EODY statement is the claim that, despite the upward trend in cases, the corresponding rise in hospitalisations over the preceding four weeks has been "very small." On the day the statement was published, the average number of COVID admissions to hospital over the preceding seven days was 310. By contrast the corresponding figure on June 1 was 83. The latest seven-day average is 399 admissions.

Deaths have been steadily increasing: 292 people died during the previous week, a 38 percent increase

compared to the week before and over three times the average weekly deaths recorded in June. The criminal policy of the Greek ruling elite has led to the deaths of almost 31,000 people in total and the infection of 4,349,423. This represents over 42 percent of the population of 10.3 million.

EODY's first weekly report was met with a huge outcry on social media. According to Merkouris the number of cases and deaths were reported "not in absolute numbers but in cases and deaths per million in a desperate attempt to hide the truth." EODY was forced to switch back to using absolute numbers.

Switching to weekly reporting has also caused massive inaccuracies in global COVID dashboards such as the "Our World In Data" website. Its administrators were not given adequate notice to account for the change and were not informed that total cases now include reinfections as opposed to the total number of people who were infected since the start of the pandemic. Magiorkinis stated, "It amazes me how these obvious programming mistakes were reproduced again and again."

Responsibility lies with the Greek government's decision, given that dashboards are set up on the assumption that numbers are provided in a consistent and accurate manner. The fact that reinfections have only now begun to be reported means that total infections have been consistently under-reported for months, with over 200,000 reinfections since the start of the pandemic not previously accounted for.

Attempts to downplay the danger are constant. In the latest EODY report, the headline figure of deaths over the previous week is given as 271, 21 deaths fewer if one considers the movement of total deaths between the last two reports. The government's aim is not to inform, but to keep the population in the dark about the pandemic's course. A way forward in the fight to end the pandemic can only be found by Greek workers undertaking to build a mass movement dedicated to a global elimination strategy.



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