Spanish scientists call to contain pandemic amid “eighth wave” of COVID-19

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Hundreds are dying of COVID-19 every week in Spain as the country suffers through the “eight wave” of the pandemic. Almost 1,000 people have lost their lives to the virus in Spain in the last fortnight alone, with 573 fatalities in the week beginning August 8 and 381 the previous week.

Infections soared over the summer, reaching a peak of 22,000 daily cases at the start of July, and maintaining averages of 3,000 to 6,000 a day throughout August. This has pushed the total number of cases in Spain over the course of the pandemic to more than 13 million; according to *The Lancet*, Spain’s excess mortality is now 162,000. Each week, several thousand people are hospitalised with the virus in Spain.

These figures are likely a significant underestimate due to Spain’s woefully inadequate testing regime. Since the Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government ended all coronavirus restrictions on April 20, tests have become increasingly difficult to access, and those infected with COVID-19 are identifying themselves less and less to local and national health services. At the end of March, the requirement to self-isolate if testing positive was also scrapped.

Spain faces wave after wave of unending contagion due to the criminal mismanagement of the pandemic by the PSOE-Podemos government. While the media promotes it as “left” or “progressive,” it has followed the same policy of mass infection pursued by capitalist governments in Europe and internationally throughout the pandemic—notably by UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, and US Presidents Donald Trump and then Joe Biden.

The new wave of infection in Spain has largely been driven by the BA.4 and BA.5 subvariants, which have been the dominant strains in this country since mid-June. According to Angel Gil, a professor of Preventive Medicine and Public Health, the arrival of BA.4 and BA.5 has pushed Spain from a seventh to an eighth wave, particularly as “these subvariants are resistant to vaccine immunity.”

As the virus continues to spread rapidly throughout Spain, numerous health experts have warned of the disastrous consequences of COVID-19 and called on the government to take action to contain it.

“We are underestimating [the virus], because we can’t talk of normality when we are seeing this dramatic number of deaths,” declared Lorenzo Armenteros, spokesperson for the Spanish Society of General Practitioners, in mid-July. “More deaths, more hospital admissions and more people in the ICU [Intensive Care Unit] is always a risk. We are minimising the problem, we are absolutely minimising it.”

Spain’s leading COVID-19 expert Luis Enjuanes denounced the PSOE-Podemos government’s campaign to declare an end of the pandemic and lift restrictions as “madness.” He urged an immediate return to mask mandates in enclosed areas as “essential,” and a return to social distancing.

Denouncing the government’s vaccine-only approach, Enjuanes stated: “not only can those who are triple vaccinated be infected with the virus, they can also strengthen the virus and spread it further. The vaccines have already lost 50 percent of their effectiveness against Omicron.”

As Enjuanes explains, current vaccines are administered intramuscularly, have a very low effectiveness in mucus and provide only short-term immunity. If the mucus layer that the virus infects is not immunised locally, the vaccine loses 98 percent of its effectiveness.

Despite the spike in deaths, hospitalisations and

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numerous warnings from experts, the PSOE-Podemos government refuses to take any action to combat the virus. In early July, PSOE Health Minister Carolina Darias politely suggested that the public exercise "caution" and return to wearing masks—although even this minimal measure was not made compulsory.

In the same breath, Darias praised Spain's vaccination programme, stating, "we have delivered 95 million doses and have given a complete set of vaccines to 92.7 percent of the population over 12, and with 50 percent vaccinated with a booster jab." Yet as scientists and the *World Socialist Web Site* have consistently warned, even the most widespread vaccination campaign will prove ineffective unless accompanied by stringent public health measures, including mask mandates, lockdowns and social distancing.

The PSOE-Podemos government has no intention of pursuing a scientific policy against the pandemic, as to do so would impinge on the profits of big business in Spain. Laying out plans to end all measures this April, Fernando Simón, the government's chief scientist, made clear that Madrid would allow mass infection and continued waves of the pandemic in order to keep workers at work, producing profits.

"We cannot eliminate the circulation of the virus unless we get slightly better vaccines," Simón stated. For this reason, he admitted, "we must assume that there will be a new [wave]." COVID-19, he insisted, 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." To add insult to injury, Simón claimed that Spanish people must be prepared to take more risk to ensure that society returns to normal.

PSOE Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, for his part, cynically claimed, "Spain is moving towards a horizon … of overcoming the pandemic." It is now becoming clear what the PSOE-Podemos government's idea of "overcoming the pandemic" looks like.

For several months, Spain has also been contending with a major outbreak of acute childhood hepatitis, with 46 cases reported in this country as of August 8. At the start of August, two children died from hepatitis, one six-year-old boy and one baby of only 15 months.

Spain has also been particularly badly impacted by the monkeypox epidemic now sweeping the world, recording nearly 6,000 cases so far—the second-highest total in the world after the United States. At the end of July, Spain reported two deaths from the disease, the only fatalities in Europe up to this point.

With no measures in place to prevent them, these outbreaks of severe disease are spreading across Spain and internationally. Workers cannot leave the decision in the hands of capitalist parties like Podemos and the PSOE, who have demonstrated their utter hostility to a scientific policy to end the pandemic. Only an independent movement of the international working class, irreconcilably opposed to parties of bourgeois rule, can stop this murderous policy of mass infection—with COVID-19, hepatitis or monkeypox—and save lives.

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