

Acting PSOE-Podemos government removes remaining mitigation measures as new Covid-19 variant Eris spreads across Spain

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A new wave of COVID-19 is rapidly spreading across Spain, fueled by the Eris variant (scientifically known as EG.5), which now accounts for over 30 percent of sequenced cases globally. It takes place just as the acting Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government has declared the end of the health crisis, and removed the last mitigation and monitoring measures.

Scientists throughout the world have also sounded the alarm over the emergence of a new COVID-19 named Pirola. After first being detected in Israel last week, Pirola was sequenced in another three countries, indicating that it has likely begun spreading globally undetected for some time.

In Spain, Pirola has yet to be detected. But it is hard to understand the true spread of the virus, given that the government, like others across the world, has dismantled basic monitoring measures.

The government stopped issuing the report with the indicators of the evolution of the pandemic and monitoring its incidence on July 4, two months after the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Biden administration in the US ended their COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE) declarations. This signaled the total collapse of the pandemic surveillance systems globally.

The only way to monitor the evolution of the virus in Spain is now the Acute Respiratory Infection Surveillance System (SiVIRA) led by the Carlos III Health Institute (ISCIII) that records the number of affected people who are treated in primary and hospital care along with other diseases such as influenza.

The latest report from SiVIRA shows that the rate of COVID-19 identified in primary care has increased

significantly from 29.3 cases per 100,000 inhabitants on July 2 to 88 cases per 100,000 inhabitants in August 6.

In the same period, the rate of hospitalizations has gone from 0.6 to 2.04 cases per 100,000 inhabitants, although it has fluctuated. The percentage of positivity to SARS-CoV-2 stands at 32 percent in the last week, when a month ago it was at 24 percent.

Another clear proof of how COVID infections is rapidly increasing across Spain is the sale of antigen tests to detect the virus. The consultancy firm Iqvia, which has been carrying out a study on the sale of tests in 6,500 chemists across the country, points out that with the data for the week of July 31 to August 6, the increase in tests sold reached 174 percent compared to the end of June.

Joan Caylà, a member of the Spanish Epidemiology Society (SEE) explained to *El Periódico de España* that the increase in infections “is multicausal: it has to do with the new variant -not yet sequenced in Spain, but in other European countries, but also with the withdrawal of the [healthcare] alarm, masks, the unconcerned attitude of the population and the summer gatherings.’ Caylà warned that “infections are increasing in the middle of summer instead of going down.’

The numbers hospitalized is beginning to be significant and could soon create problems. In Catalonia, there were 453 hospitalized as of last week. In the Basque country it has quadrupled to 124, from 30 the month before. In Galicia, the main hospitals have over 70 patients admitted.

The new spread of the virus will mean more Long Covid cases and its debilitating impact. Almost two million suffer from Long COVID in Spain and, of

them, 600,000 have suffered from it for more than three years.

According to a follow-up survey carried out by the Spanish Society of General and Family Physicians (SEMG), only 15.6 percent of those affected by Long COVID work “under normal conditions”, compared to 46 percent who are on sick leave or work “with great difficulty”. 9.5 percent of those surveyed lost their job and only 2.9 percent have achieved permanent disability status. Workers who suffer from this dangerous ailment are either left out of the labor market due to their inability to work or are forced to work with pain or severe suffering, making it very difficult for their situation to be recognised and for them to be granted disability status.

The researcher at the AIDS Research Institute (IrsiCaixa), Roger Paredes told *El Periódico de España*, “The fact that you have not had persistent COVID in the first or second infection does not mean that you cannot contract it in the third.”

This is a serious problem that will continue to spread as infections grow.

Countries like the United States, Italy, South Korea, Japan and many others are suffering an increase in COVID cases similar to Spain due to the absolute passivity of capitalist governments and the complicit silence of the media.

The acting PSOE-Podemos government has refused to make any public statement even as cases rise since it announced the end of the health emergency on July 4 and was lifting obligatory masking in health centres. The Ministry of Health has also stopped publishing its weekly reports of infections, hospitalisations and deaths, even those over the age of 65, who were the only category monitored since the government announced the end of the surveillance for the general population in March 2022.

For those infected due to their work activity, particularly health workers who are in the frontline, PSOE-Podemos—in collaboration with the trade union bureaucracy—is making sure they receive as little compensation as possible to prioritise profits and cut costs.

As of July 26, COVID-19 infections in the workplace will not be considered occupational diseases, which means that these workers will receive less money for sick leave, money that will be saved by both public

social security system and private companies in the health sector.

The reaction of the acting PSOE-Podemos government is a warning of any new government that will be formed in the wake of Spain’s contested July 23 general election. Whatever government is eventually formed amid ongoing negotiations—whether led by the right-wing People’s Party (PP) with the neo-Francoist Vox or the PSOE with the pseudo-left electoral platform Sumar (which incorporates the PSOE’s former coalition partner Podemos)—homicidal indifference to stopping the pandemic will remain. The incoming government will be pledged to maximise profits and subject the population to perpetual waves of infection, death and debilitation with Long COVID.

The PSOE-Podemos’ policies on the pandemic have already led to mass deaths. According to *The Lancet* calculations, these policies have already cost the lives of 162,000 lives as per excess deaths, even though official data remains at over 120,000.

Meanwhile, the government continues to spend billions of euros on the Spanish military and NATO’s war against Russia in Ukraine, while showering large banks and corporations with billions of euros from European funds. That’s where money that could be used to fund next-generation COVID-19 vaccines, therapeutics and the renovation of infrastructure to prevent airborne transmission is going.

As the WSWS warned in its recent perspective, “the pandemic is a social and political crisis which can only be resolved through the mass, unified struggle of the international working class, in coordination with principled scientists in every country. From the beginning, the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) have clearly explained this imperative and provided leadership in this struggle. Now, as new and potentially more dangerous variants sweep the globe, it is ever more necessary to deepen this fight on a world scale.”



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