

UK poll findings showing substantial support for COVID public health measures denounced by right-wing media

Robert Stevens
15 December 2023

COVID is spreading throughout Britain ahead the holiday season, with the new JN.1 variant accounting for one in every 13 cases in November.

The end of systematic testing means hospitalisations are the only real indicator of the spread of the disease. These are rising sharply. In the week to December 8, in England, 2,622 infected patients were admitted to hospital, a 40 percent increase on the total a fortnight ago.

The ruling elite long ago declared the pandemic over, ditching every public health measure in place. This was done with the lie, supported by all parliamentary parties, that everyone wanted to abandon all efforts to control the virus, denounced as an affront to people's freedom.

For the ruling class, what "living with the virus" really means is that nothing can be allowed to interfere with the profit making of the corporations, whatever the cost to the health and lives of the population.

This attitude is expressed in the denial of vaccine boosters to millions (anyone younger than 65 and without specific health conditions) and the lack of any effort to encourage those eligible to get their shot. Only 2.3 million people out of a population of 66 million in Britain have received this winter's booster.

Under these conditions, a survey by the More in Common think tank has sent shockwaves through ruling circles, making clear that millions are opposed to this agenda. More in Common projects an ostensibly liberal outlook, having been founded by the husband of Labour MP Jo Cox after she was murdered by a fascist during the 2016 Brexit referendum campaign.

Over 2,000 people in Britain were asked between November 30 and December 4: "Currently, there are no legal Covid-19 restrictions in place in the UK. Thinking of the current health situation in the UK, would you support or oppose the Government re-introducing each of

the following Covid-19 restrictions at the current time?"

A fifth of adults responded that they would support the reintroduction of a lockdown, leaving home only for essential shopping, work and an hour of exercise. Over a fifth (22 percent) of those aged 18-24 (Gen Z) supported the measure. Of those aged 25-40 (Millennials), almost 28 percent were in favour. For those aged 41-55 (Gen X), 56-74, and 75-plus, the rates of support were over 19 percent, nearly 16 percent and nearly 14 percent.

The highest rates of support across all age groups (45 percent overall) were for wearing masks on public transport—a highly effective measure for preventing the spread of the disease.

Measures to close pubs and restaurants were backed by 20 percent of those polled, with almost 25 percent of Gen Z supporting the move, and over 25 percent of Millennials. One third of those aged 25-40 backed the closing of nightclubs, as did almost a third of those aged 18-24.

Nearly a quarter of respondents (23 percent) said they would support limiting meetings to outdoor settings and only in groups of up to six. Among Millennials, support for the measure rose to 29 percent. Even among the oldest age group—tending to be the most opposed to public health measures despite their increased risk profile for COVID—support for this measure still reached 18 percent.

Significantly, support for public health measures was highest in London—the capital, and by far the most densely populated area of the UK—and the North East of England, one of the country's poorest regions.

Drunk on its own propaganda agitating for the end of any public health response to the pandemic, the right-wing media responded to its rude awakening with wild denunciations. The response was summed up by the pro-Tory *Daily Mail's* headline: "Proof Britain has gone

completely bonkers?”.

The newspaper interviewed Professor Keith Willison, chair of chemical biology at Imperial College London and among those who favoured a return to work as early as May 2020 to “reactivate the economy”, while COVID was still rampant. Willison told *MailOnline* in horror, “It is upsetting that 20 per cent of UK adults feel this way about reintroducing lockdown restrictions. It demonstrates the effectiveness of ‘project fear’ which was initiated four years ago now... It is going to take many years to recover from the lockdown disaster... ‘Project fear’ also helped drive the emergence of the working from home lifestyle”.

More in Common itself was taken aback by the results of its survey. UK associate Ed Hodgson told the right-wing GB News, “We did the poll twice just because we wanted to make sure people understand this was not a hypothetical, we weren’t asking what would people want if COVID got worse. We were asking what they thought right now.”

Trying to downplay the findings, Hodgson told *MailOnline*, “it should be stressed support for these measures in the abstract doesn’t always translate into support in real life when the impacts of such policies become clearer.”

But this is belied by More in Common’s own earlier multi-nation polling of 14,000 people in September 2020 which found that “No country reports higher numbers of people following COVID-19 rules than Britain.” The other countries surveyed were France, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Poland, and the United States. At that time, 58 percent of Britons followed the rules “very closely”; and 36 percent “somewhat closely”. Very small minorities of 4 percent followed the rules “not very closely” and 3 percent “not closely at all”.

According to an Ipsos poll published this September, a significant section of the population were already or were planning in the next two weeks to take measures to stop the spread of COVID. It found that more than a third of people reported not going or planning not to go to pubs and restaurants, among them two fifths of young people, specifically to avoid them or their family catching COVID. Half of young people said they still wore/planned to wear face masks, along with 30 percent of people aged 55-75. More than two fifths of people said they were taking lateral flow tests, despite them not being available for free from the National Health Service since April 1, 2022.

Again, these findings were met with disbelief by those

conducting the survey, with Cameron Garrett, research manager at Ipsos, stating, “we will have some overclaim on surveys like this where we are prompting them to think about COVID. There will also be some who read it and say they are avoiding it when actually they don’t do these things in the first place”.

The reality is that many people do not accept the incessant propaganda fed to them by a ruling elite already responsible for over 233,000 COVID deaths and another almost 2 million debilitated by Long COVID. The lived experience of millions, as they themselves fall ill with COVID, along with other people around them, is at odds with the lies of a homicidal ruling elite which could not care less about the human cost of living with a deadly, mutating virus.

Nor is the response recorded in the surveys “authoritarian”, in Hodgson’s words to the *Independent*. What he and the media denounce as “heavy handed” interventions are in fact scientifically informed measures understood by many to be the only rational and humane answer to a pandemic which is being allowed to run out of control.

What really incenses the right-wing media is the spirit of collectivism and social responsibility revealed by the survey figures, which is anathema to the dog-eat-dog individualism promoted by capitalism. The fact that this is more pronounced among younger layers, who have grown up with global economic, geopolitical and climate crises, fuelled by the profit lust and greed of the super rich, is significant.

It should also be noted that the results of these polls are snapshots of social consciousness, under the pressure of enormous propaganda and with no organised political opposition mounted outside of the *World Socialist Web Site*. By the New Year, with tens of millions having gathered together for the holiday season, the virus spreading even more widely and the regular National Health Service winter crisis in full swing, many more will have drawn the same conclusion.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact