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Britain's dangerous new COVID-19 strain:

A warning to take urgent action now!

With 1.7 million people already dead worldwide and hospitals overwhelmed, scientists are sounding the alarm about a new, more infectious strain of COVID-19 that has emerged in Britain and is leading to a major surge in infections there.

The new strain of COVID-19 is believed to be responsible for the doubling of daily new COVID-19 cases in the UK this month. The country recorded 35,000 new cases on Sunday, its highest ever, up from an average of just 15,000 two weeks before.

The massive spread of this new strain of COVID-19 stands as yet another indictment of the Johnson government's reckless and criminal response to the pandemic. By abandoning all efforts to eradicate the virus, the government left the population vulnerable and exposed to a deadly threat the consequences of which are still unknown.



A man wears a face mask to protect from coronavirus as he walks past Westminster underground station, in London, Tuesday, Dec. 15, 2020 (AP Photo/Alberto Pezzali)

The new strain appears to be 70 percent more infectious than the variants currently spreading throughout Europe and America. There is, as of now, no evidence that the new vaccinations will not be effective against this strain.

While the new variant of the disease was first detected in September, by November a quarter of new cases in London were attributed to it. By mid-December, this had reached three quarters of all new cases.

Beyond making it into every part of the UK, the new variant has already spread to the Netherlands, Denmark and Australia, according to the World Health Organization. “The new variant is out of control,” UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock said.

“This new variant is very concerning and is unlike anything we have seen so far in the pandemic,” Jeffrey Barrett, director of the COVID-19 Genomics Initiative at the Wellcome Sanger Institute, told the *Financial Times*.

On Saturday Professor John Edmunds, an epidemiologist and member of the government’s Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) committee, described the emergence of the new strain as the “worst moment of the whole epidemic as far as I’m concerned.” He warned of the “extraordinary infectivity of the new strain.”

Edmunds urged, “We will need much more severe measures to bring the incidence down. Worse than that we are starting from a very high incidence already with hospitals stretched and [National Health Service] staff under strain. It is a very perilous situation.”

On Sunday, countries throughout Europe and the world announced they would no longer admit travellers from Britain, including Austria, Belgium, Italy, Ireland, Germany, France and the Netherlands. On Saturday, Johnson introduced a new “Tier 4” level of restrictions, affecting 16.4 million people, including around 9 million people in all 32 London boroughs and much of southeast England.

The new variant of COVID-19 involves mutations in the structure of the virus. Barrett noted that 23 letters of the virus’s genetic code had changed, including 17 that could potentially impact the way the virus behaves and spreads.

Science journalist Laurie Garrett noted that COVID-19 has undergone three major changes so far this year. “Why is it happening? Because there’s so much virus in the world now, spreading fast, [increase]ing likelihood of random mutations. Is the new mutant in the US? Who knows?”

The emergence of this deadly new strain of COVID-19 underscores the criminal irresponsibility of the Johnson government and its “herd immunity” policy in response to the pandemic.

In March, Sir Patrick Vallance, the government's chief scientific adviser, stood alongside Johnson and declared, "It's not possible to stop everyone getting it, and it's also not desirable." On March 5, Johnson outlined his government's response to the pandemic by saying, "perhaps you could take it on the chin, take it all in one go and allow the disease, as it were, to move through the population, without taking as many draconian measures."

In August, former Labour Leader Jeremy Corbyn explained that in March he was briefed by the British government that its aim was to "build up herd immunity by allowing people to die," a policy that was justified through what he called "Eugenic formulas." Corbyn kept silent about the government's homicidal intentions for six months.

The result of this policy has been a disaster. Nearly 70,000 people are dead in the UK. The country has a per capita mortality rate even higher than the United States, and 50 percent higher than Europe as a whole. And now, nearly a year after the pandemic first emerged, it is spreading, in the words of the government, "out of control" in the form of a new strain of the disease.

For weeks, the Johnson government has sought to use the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines – which will become available to the general public within a matter of months – to distract attention from its total failure to take any serious measures to contain the disease. The media was happy to play along, seeking to drown out the constantly rising death rate with nonstop coverage of the vaccine rollout.

Johnson claimed Saturday that "the situation has deteriorated since I last spoke to you three days ago"—the day he declared that there would be no retreat from plans for shops to open 24 hours a day and for "bubbles" of three households to meet for five days over Christmas. The government had first learned about the new strain "earlier this week," he added.

These are bare faced lies.

The government spent the last week stonewalling demands from scientists to abandon its deadly plans and had even threatened several London local authorities with legal action for planning to close schools three days before the official end of term to prevent a further spike in infections. Moreover, Maria Van Kerkhove, COVID-19 technical lead at the World Health Organisation, told the BBC on Sunday that the UK had been aware of the new viral strain circulating in "south-east England since September."

While definitive information is yet to surface as to the origins of the mutation, the premeditated and criminal inaction of the Tory government allowed it to spread unchecked. The new strain was detected at the same time the government insisted on reopening schools, followed by students being sent back to colleges and university campuses one month later.

These policies were sanctioned because the government wanted to ensure the profit margins of the corporations in the vital Christmas spending spree and because they wanted no challenge to the narrative that defeating the virus was only a matter of time.

The placing of profits above human safety and lives has instead led to an even more infectious strain of the virus spreading halfway around the world in a matter of weeks.

The murderous actions of the Johnson government are echoed by its counterparts in every country.

In the United States, 320,000 people are dead. In France 60,418 are dead, and 26,414 in Germany. Whether it is Trump or Biden, Merkel or Macron, no one can believe a word that these representatives of the ruling class say. Their entire response from the beginning has been dictated by the interests of the corporations and a super-rich oligarchy. Whatever the political coloration of the government, the policy is the same: Profits are what counts, and the lives of millions of workers are expendable.

Almost 1.7 million lives have already been lost globally, and thousands more are dying every day. There is no time to lose! Emergency measures must be taken to bring the virus under control!

The Socialist Equality Party in the UK, together with its sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International throughout the world, demands the immediate closure of all nonessential businesses and schools. This must be accompanied by full compensation for lost wages and small business income.

Trillions of dollars must be invested in health care infrastructure to treat, contain and eradicate COVID-19, and ensure society is protected from the threat of infectious disease in the future.

The claim that there is no money for these necessary emergency measures to save lives is a lie. The social resources required for the most vital public health needs of the population are monopolized by a financial elite whose interests are diametrically opposed to the needs of society.

It is up to workers to save their own lives! The Socialist Equality Party urges workers and young people who want to fight for this program to contact us today.

21 December 2020