

Spike in Kawasaki-like disease linked to coronavirus in France and Italy, one child dies

By Will Morrow
18 May 2020

French media reported on Friday that a nine-year-old boy in the city of Marseille died a week ago of a multi-system inflammatory disease that medical researchers have recently linked to the coronavirus pandemic. The emerging condition produces symptoms similar to Kawasaki disease and affects children. It has seen a jump in incidence since the onset of the pandemic, and most or all of the children who have presented symptoms of the disorder are believed to have tested positive for the coronavirus.

The child was admitted to the North Marseille urgent pediatric ward on May 2 with a rash but was sent home after doctors diagnosed him with scarlet fever. Later that evening, his health deteriorated rapidly and he was transported back to the emergency care, where doctors identified his symptoms with the rare Kawasaki-like syndrome. On May 8, he died in the hospital after a heart attack.

According to the French national health service, the boy suffered a preexisting comorbidity in some form of neurodevelopmental condition, though it is unclear how this affected his response to the disease. He tested positive for the coronavirus though he had not displayed any symptoms of it. The child has become the fourth death from the condition. A five-year-old and seven-year-old have died in the US and a fourteen-year-old in the UK.

This is a damning indictment of capitalist governments internationally who are reopening schools and asserting that the virus does not harm children.

The precise nature of the connection between the condition and the coronavirus is yet to be determined. On Friday, the World Health Organization published an international call for researchers to study the

connection between the coronavirus and the newly-named multisystem inflammatory disorder in children and adolescents.

Symptoms include a rash, hypotension or shock, vomiting or diarrhea and abnormalities in the heart. The report notes that: “reports from Europe and North America have described clusters of children and adolescents requiring admission to intensive care units with a multisystem inflammatory condition with some features similar to those of Kawasaki disease and toxic shock syndrome. Case reports and small series have described a presentation of acute illness accompanied by a hyper-inflammatory syndrome, leading to multi-organ failure and shock.

“It is essential to characterize this syndrome and its risk factors, to understand causality, and describe treatment interventions. It is not yet clear the full spectrum of disease, and whether the geographical distribution in Europe and North America reflects a true pattern, or if the condition has simply not been recognized elsewhere.”

Most of the children who have presented symptoms of the disorder have also tested positive for coronavirus, either from directly from nasal swabs or via antibody tests. There is believed to be a delay of four to six weeks from the point of infection with coronavirus and the onset of symptoms of the recently-discovered condition, including in cases of asymptomatic coronavirus patients. (For a more detailed explanation of the disorder, see: “Kawasaki-like disease afflicting young children and teens after infection with SARS-CoV-2”)

On Tuesday, the French national health agency reported for the first time on the number of cases of the

syndrome in the country, placing the number at 125.

On Friday, the minister of health reported that the number had increased to 135. In Britain, according to the Guardian, there are between 75 and 100 children receiving treatment for the condition across the country.

A study was published on Friday in the *Lancet* by researchers in Italy who examined the incidence of the condition in Bergamo, an initial epicenter of the pandemic. They found a thirty-fold increase in the incidence of Kawasaki-like syndrome in the region compared to before the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. The researchers concluded: “The SARS-CoV-2 epidemic was associated with high incidence of a severe form of Kawasaki disease. A similar outbreak of Kawasaki-like disease is expected in countries involved in the SARS-CoV-2 epidemic.”

The ongoing studies on the danger of coronavirus for children make clear that scientists are still seeking to come to grips with the full impact of the coronavirus and particularly its danger for children.

Even as these studies take place, however, governments across Europe and internationally are reopening schools, declaring without evidence that the virus cannot harm children and that even when carrying the virus, children will not pass it on to others.

More than 1.5 million students have returned to school across France over the past week, according to government figures. Schools have also reopened in Belgium, the Netherlands, Finland, Norway, and in parts of Germany, while re-openings are underway elsewhere.

The driving force behind the school reopening policy is not a fight against the pandemic, but the placing of children in classrooms so that their parents may be forced back to work, and the flow of corporate profits for the corporate and financial elite may be resumed and continued. In France, the school re-openings are being carried out in defiance of the official recommendation of the national scientific council, which had recommended a delay until September.

Today, the re-openings are being expanded to include students in sixth and seventh grade. French Education Minister Michel Blanquer told Europe1 on Monday last week that school re-openings were necessary because children were “safer” in classrooms than in their own homes.

“In a general sense, we are now in a society where the virus is circulating,” he said. “That’s a fact ... There are more risks in staying at home than going to school ... If we take the contrary approach, we could all hide under our couch and wait for a vaccine. And the society would collapse from other reasons than COVID-19.”

Blanquer feigned concern over the plight of children unable to eat at home or suffering domestic violence, leaving out that the Macron government’s own austerity policies have exacerbated these conditions that it has refused to provide any significant support to the working class.

The end to lock-down measures is being accelerated even as signs emerge an uptick in new cases across France. On Saturday, while the number of total people hospitalized had fallen from 22,614 to 19,432 compared to the week before, the number of new admissions was almost 50 percent higher, with 350 new cases compared to 265 on May 9. Similarly, the number of newly admitted intensive care patients was 46 on Saturday, compared to 38 the week before.

Since the lifting of the confinement on May 11, 25 new clusters have been detected across France. The Regional Health Agency (ARS) of Centre-Val de Loire reported on Saturday that 34 workers at a slaughterhouse in Fleury-les-Aubrais had tested positive for the virus. On Sunday, the ARS in Bretagne reported that 69 cases had been detected among employees and their contacts at a slaughterhouse in Côtes-d’Amour.

To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>