

WHO warns of “very significant” coronavirus resurgence in Europe

By Will Morrow
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On Thursday, the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Director for Europe, Dr. Hans Henri Kluge, gave a press conference in Copenhagen and warned of a “very significant” resurgence of the coronavirus taking place across the continent. Europe saw an increase in total weekly cases for the first time in months last week.

“For weeks I have spoken about the risk of resurgence as countries adjust new measures,” Kluge said, referencing governments’ ending of lock-down policies. “In several countries across Europe, this risk has now become a reality—30 countries have seen increases in new cumulative cases over the past two weeks.” This is more than half the 54 countries that make up WHO’s European region.

“In 11 of these countries,” he added, “accelerated transmission has led to very significant resurgence that if left unchecked will push health systems to the brink once again in Europe.” These are largely concentrated in eastern Europe: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, North Macedonia and Ukraine, as well as Sweden in northern Europe.

The WHO regional director’s warning comes as the rate of spread of the virus is accelerating globally. There were a record number of new cases reported on Sunday, with over 183,000 in 24 hours. Europe has reported more than 2.5 million cases, slightly less than a quarter of the international total. It continues to report almost 20,000 cases and 700 deaths every day.

The resurgence of the virus is being driven by governments’ reopening policy, whose aim is the full and unhindered resumption of corporate profit-making activities, regardless of the threat that this poses to the working population.

In the countries of western Europe which imposed

fairly stringent lock-down policies that have since been lifted, there are many signs that the impact of these measures on the spread of the virus is over and that a new acceleration is underway.

Increasingly the hot-spots of the virus are concentrated in poorer and working class areas where large numbers of people live or reside in close quarters with no protection.

The Italian government deployed riot police and military troops to the coastal town of Mondragone, 60km south of north of Naples in the country’s south, on Wednesday and Thursday, after protests erupted by residents of an impoverished community estate that has been placed under lockdown. There are more than 700 residents in the estate, most of them reportedly immigrant workers from Bulgaria, who pick fruit for poverty-level wages and are now unable to work or obtain any income. The *Corriere della Sera* described the complex as “one of thousands of ghettos in Italy” with “more or less heinous conditions.” At least 45 cases were detected at the estate.

Similar conditions exist at the Göttingen high-rise complex in Germany, which was quarantined last week by German police after at least 120 cases were found. The apartments of entire families with several children range in size from 19 to 37 square meters. These conditions caused protests by residents against the quarantine, which were met by the deployment of riot police.

Germany’s r-value, which estimates the average number of people that a carrier of the virus infects, increased to 2.88 this week, after the discovery of a massive cluster at a Tönnies abattoir in the western state of North Rhine-Westphalia. An r-value above 1 indicates that the virus is spreading exponentially. The seven-day averaged r-value, which is more stable,

increased from 1.55 to 2.03 with the detection of the outbreak.

At least 1,558 workers at the Tönnies have tested positive, more than one fifth of the total workforce, and more than two-thirds of the workers in the cutting department. The employees live in cramped company-provided accommodation.

In Portugal, nineteen of 24 districts in the capital Lisbon have been placed on lock-down Thursday until at least July 14. On Thursday, the health ministry confirmed 311 new cases, almost 80 percent of which were in Lisbon.

In France, the r-value is increasing in seven out of 13 departmental regions, meaning that the rate of propagation of the virus is accelerating. In three areas, Normandie, Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes and Occitanie, the r-value is above 1. In the central Île-de-France area that includes Paris, it is at 0.94. The national average for the period of June 6 to 12 was 0.93, an increase from 0.88 at the beginning of June.

In French Guyana, an overseas territory bordering Brazil, the situation is extremely stark. The number of cases per 100,000 members of the population has exploded to 308, compared to 88 only one week ago.

On Wednesday, the Macron administration announced a further lifting of whatever remained of the restrictions on the operations of employers kept in place after confinement was ended on May 11. Labor minister Muriel Pénicaud released a new set of guidelines for employers, which no longer require that a surface area of four square meters per employee be available in order to ensure social distancing between co-workers.

The four square-meter requirement is being replaced by a “guide” for employees to have one meter of separation between one another. This is non-binding and amounts to nothing. The new recommendations add that if the one-meter distancing cannot be maintained, employees should wear a mask. They are otherwise not required to do so. More than 29,700 people have died from the virus in France.

In Britain, where hundreds continue to die every day from the virus, Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced an end to the remaining lockdown measures on Tuesday. As in France, social distancing requirements have similarly been replaced with meaningless “advice” of a one-meter separation.

The full reopening policy of European governments amounts to an unstated implementation of the murderous pseudo-scientific “theory” of “herd immunity.” The spread of the virus is to be allowed to continue, in order that there may be no fetters on the profit-making of the corporate and financial elite.

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