

Schools at epicentre of UK's coronavirus explosion

By Robert Stevens
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COVID-19 is spreading out of control in Britain, with levels of infection not seen since May being recorded. Last Friday, Saturday and Sunday all saw above 3,300 cases daily. A further 2,621 cases and nine deaths were recorded on Monday, a normal “weekend-dip” in reports—followed by 3,105 cases and 27 deaths on Tuesday.

The virus is resurgent in workplaces, schools, and communities, with the *R* (reproduction) value rising last Friday to between 1.0 and 1.2. In London and the North West of England, *R* is between 1.1 and 1.3, higher than the UK's other regions.

According to official figures, an average of 2,998 daily infections are being recorded daily—an amount that has nearly doubled in two weeks from the seven-day rolling average of 1,323 on August 31. The real numbers infected is far larger as many thousands of people are unable to get a test after showing symptoms.

Official deaths in Britain stand at 41,637. But this is sharply contradicted by Office for National Statistics figures published yesterday, showing that 57,528 fatalities with COVID-19 mentioned on the death certificate were registered in the UK up to September 4-6. Other authoritative assessments of the COVID-19 death toll, based on excess deaths, are over 65,000.

Such is the spread of coronavirus that Boris Johnson's Conservative government, which adopted a strategy of herd immunity at the beginning of the pandemic, has been forced to impose new national restrictions. Its policy of “local lockdowns” were so porous they only contributed to the spread of the infection over wide areas of the country.

On Monday, social gatherings of more than six people were made illegal, as the “rule of six” came into force. This too will do little or nothing to stop the

spread of the virus. The rule is not even being applied uniformly across the UK. In England, it applies indoors and outdoors and includes children; in Scotland indoors and outdoors and excludes children; in Wales indoors only and excludes children; and in Northern Ireland indoors only and includes children.

Tens of millions of workers, including all educators and pupils, will remain exposed to the virus, with the government stating that “education and work settings are unaffected” by the “rule of six.” True to their naked class bias, the Tories had to delay their announcement by several days while mulling over what to do with grouse shooting during the season. They determined that six people cannot mingle at a birthday or Christmas party and that two families of four stopping for a talk in the street would be illegal “mingling.” But parties of up to 30 people can don their flat caps, Barbour jackets, tweeds and wellies, and spend a costly day on the moors with their wealthy chums.

Under conditions where there is no mass testing in the UK, Prime Minister Boris Johnson declared in announcing the measures, “Workplaces could be opened up to all those who test negative that morning and allow them to behave in a way that was normal before COVID... Theatres and sports venues could test all audience members on the day and let in those with a negative result, all those who are not infectious.”

With the entire economy opened and the virus spreading like wildfire, he signed off with “Wash your hands, cover your face, and make space.”

The reopening of schools—nearly a month ago in Scotland and from September in the rest of the UK—with over 10 million pupils and 2 million school staff returning—is a central factor in the explosion of COVID-19 cases. This will be made much worse next week with 2 million students travelling all over the UK

to university towns and cities to resume their courses.

Already, nearly 1,000 schools have been hit with infections and the number is shooting up exponentially.

The government is providing no national breakdown of infections in schools. The ToryFibs twitter group is providing a daily tally on school infections based on reports from school websites, news reports and National Health Service updates. By 5pm Monday evening it reported infections at 792 schools and just three hours later this had increased to 850 schools. By Tuesday morning it rose to 877 schools, and by Tuesday evening reached 913.

Among those in an infected household is Labour Party leader Sir Keir Starmer, whose two children have been at school throughout the pandemic. Starmer went into self-isolation on Monday as a “family member” showed symptoms of coronavirus. The SKWAWKBOX website reported that “Labour insiders” said that Starmer “is self-isolating because one of his children is showing coronavirus symptoms.”

Starmer played a central role in enforcing the unsafe reopening of schools, declaring last month in Parliament to Johnson, “I don’t just want all children back at school next month, I expect them back at school. No ifs, no buts, no equivocation.”

Starmer was insisting on a return to school as the government was lying about the spread of coronavirus in schools that were open. Amid a barrage of propaganda, Public Health England, in an August 23 statement, claimed “out of more than 1 million children attending pre-school and primary school in June, just 70 children were affected,” boasting that this represented a rate of 0.01 percent.

With up to a half of all COVID-19 deaths in the UK and over half in Scotland taking place in care homes, there are major concerns that the resurgence will take thousands of more lives among the elderly.

Last Friday, Stuart Miller, the director of adult social care delivery at the Department of Health and Social Care, wrote to all care providers, local authority chief executives and directors of adult social care, warning that there are the “first signs” of rising infections being “reflected in care homes” across Britain. The *Sunday Times* revealed that there have been outbreaks in at least 43 homes. This is likely a significant underestimation. In the week to last Friday, coronavirus outbreaks were confirmed at 12 care homes just in the

city of Salford, with three residents dying.

Outbreaks in food processing factories continue. At the Aunt Bessie’s Yorkshire puddings and desserts factory in Hull, a worker is “seriously ill” after being infected and another has been sent home. Aunt Bessie’s admitted last week to a “small number” of infections among its 400 employees and has kept production running. However, on Monday a factory on the same Freightliner Road, Chaucer Foods, was forced to “temporarily suspend production” to test all staff.

Pubs are another major vector of the disease, with people supposedly under a local “lockdown” able to freely congregate for weeks at nearly 50,000 pubs nationally. The largest pub chain, Wetherspoons, admitted Monday that 66 staff have already tested positive for COVID-19 in 50 pubs since reopening.

The resurgence is brutally exposing government lies that it is operating a “state of the art” Test and Trace system. The *Sunday Times* reported leaked documents showing a backlog of 185,000 tests, with swabs being destroyed and the government requesting that labs in Germany and Italy carry out the necessary processing.

On Monday, it was revealed that for millions of people in England’s 10 outbreak hotspots, no walk-in, drive-in or postal coronavirus tests were available with the government testing web site reporting a message: “This service is currently very busy. More tests should be available later.” One of the hotspots is Bolton in the north west of England, with an infection rate of 122 cases for every 100,000 people. This is an infection rate almost 10 times higher than the rate that puts a country on the UK’s quarantine list.

These developments underscore the importance of the formation of the Educators Rank-and-File Committee in the UK, which is mobilising teachers and parents in the fight against the unsafe opening of schools. We urge educators and parents to attend the next meeting of the Educators Rank-and-File Committee on Saturday, September 19, 2-4.00pm. To attend please register here.

To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>