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Two years since the WHO declared the COVID pandemic: New cases rising once again, driven by the BA.2 subvariant of Omicron

Friday, March 11, marked the second anniversary of the official declaration by the World Health Organization that the outbreak of COVID-19 was a “pandemic.” Two years into this global catastrophe, capitalist governments have effectively declared the pandemic over and announced a return to “normal,” despite persistent high rates of community transmission throughout the world.



Dr. Michael Ryan (left) at a conference in 2020 when the WHO declared the pandemic a Public Health emergency of International Concern [Credit: Fabrice Coffrini]

Many governments are lifting all mandates and curtailing testing and vaccination efforts. Global vaccination rates are down to levels last seen in May 2021 when campaigns were

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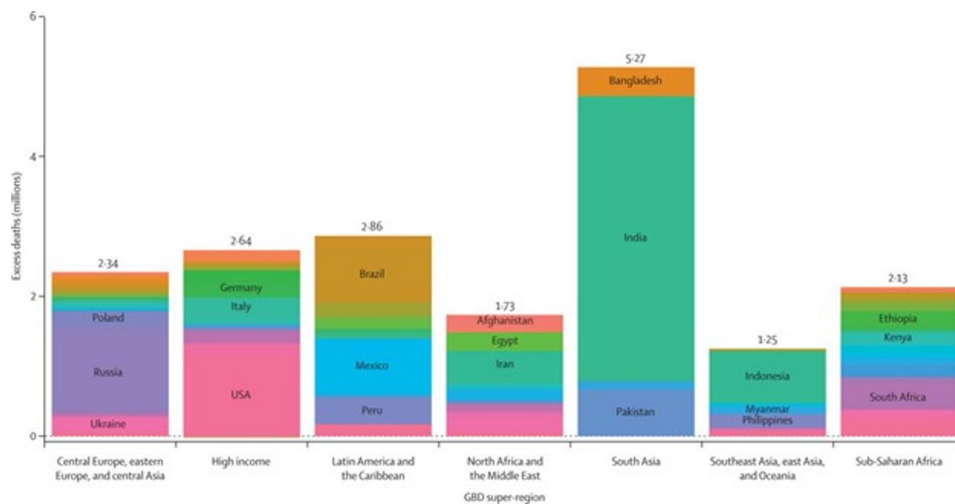
just underway to vaccinate populations. Vaccine inequity continues to plague lower-income nations. Budgets for pandemic response are being slashed, replaced with a massive infusion of funds to finance the drive to war.

Two years ago, when the global death toll stood at less than 5,000, WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus referred to the “alarming levels of inaction” from national governments. Today, with the official death toll at more than six million, the response of the ruling class can be termed nothing less than social murder, a crime that continues.

The world remains under international health regulations that continue to deem the COVID pandemic a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). Some of these requirements include surveillance and mandatory case reporting.

According to Clare Wenham, a researcher in global health policy at the London School of Economics, the WHO convenes every three months to reappraise the global situation against three criteria. She told the *Financial Times*, “If the committee decides the outbreak is no longer unusual and unexpected, no longer risking international spread and no longer requiring a coordinated international effort, the PHEIC ends.”

The impact of the pandemic is staggering. Nearly one million people have died in the United States, 1.7 million in Europe, 1.3 million in Asia, 1.2 million in South America, and more than 250,000 in Africa. But these official figures far understate reality. According to the *Economist’s* modeling, excess deaths from the pandemic are closer to 20 million. This figure has been corroborated in a peer-reviewed study published in *The Lancet*, which found that excess deaths from the pandemic through December 31, 2021 are three times higher than official figures.



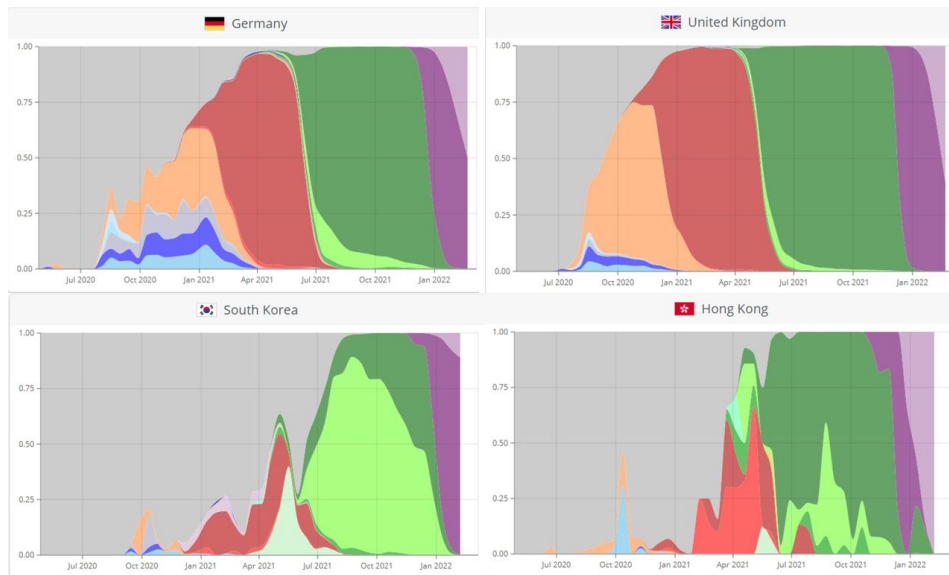
Excess deaths by region January 2020 to December 2021 (Source: The Lancet)

Since New Year's Day 2022, another 600,000 people have died across the globe, predominately from the supposedly "mild" Omicron variant. The seven-day moving average of daily global deaths remains at close to 6,600. However, the prediction made by Dr. Hans Kluge, WHO's Regional Director for Europe, that "European nations could soon be entering a long period of tranquility" after the Omicron wave passed is proving disastrous. As Editor-in-Chief of *The Lancet* said in mid-February, "His [Hans Kluge's] words promote a false reassurance that could breed complacency, even deceit."

The WHO's Technical Advisory Group on COVID-19 released an interim statement on Tuesday, March 8, 2022 that paints a grim picture. It cautioned that though global cases were declining, the situation remained tenuous and volatile, as many regions and countries have reported a sudden rise. It also warned that the drastic reduction in testing and resources would severely hinder pandemic response measures.

The situation remains more than volatile. Since the release of the interim statement, new COVID cases across the globe have taken a sudden upturn. On February 28 the number of daily cases stood at 1.15 million per day, but by March 10 that figure had rapidly risen to 1.82 million. The seven-day average of new cases globally is 1.56 million per day and climbing again.

Moreover, many of the major countries in Europe that are now seeing new surges where "BA.2 subvariant of the Omicron variant just came off a wave of infections caused by the BA.1 subvariant."



Proportion of sequences of the BA.2 (light purple) subvariant Germany, United Kingdom, South Korea, and Hong Kong (Source Covariants.org)

The WHO added in their interim statement, “At a global level, BA.1 has been the predominant Omicron lineage. However, the proportion of reported sequences designated as BA.2 has been increasing relative to BA.1 in recent weeks and is the predominant Omicron lineage in several countries.”

Germany reported more than 300,000 new cases yesterday, a pandemic high for the country. The seven-day average of COVID deaths has crept upwards, passing 200 deaths per day. In response to these developments, Germany’s health minister, Karl Lauterbach, said during a coronavirus briefing yesterday, “We are in a situation that I would like to describe as critical. We have strongly rising case figures again... I keep reading that the Omicron variant is a milder variant, but that’s only true to a limited extent.”

Like many of its major European counterparts, Germany has managed to fully vaccinate around three quarters of its population. More than half have received a booster, or third shot. The claims of the ruling class that the vaccine would solve the pandemic has proven bankrupt, as the continued spread of the virus leads to the evolution of new, vaccine-resistant variants.

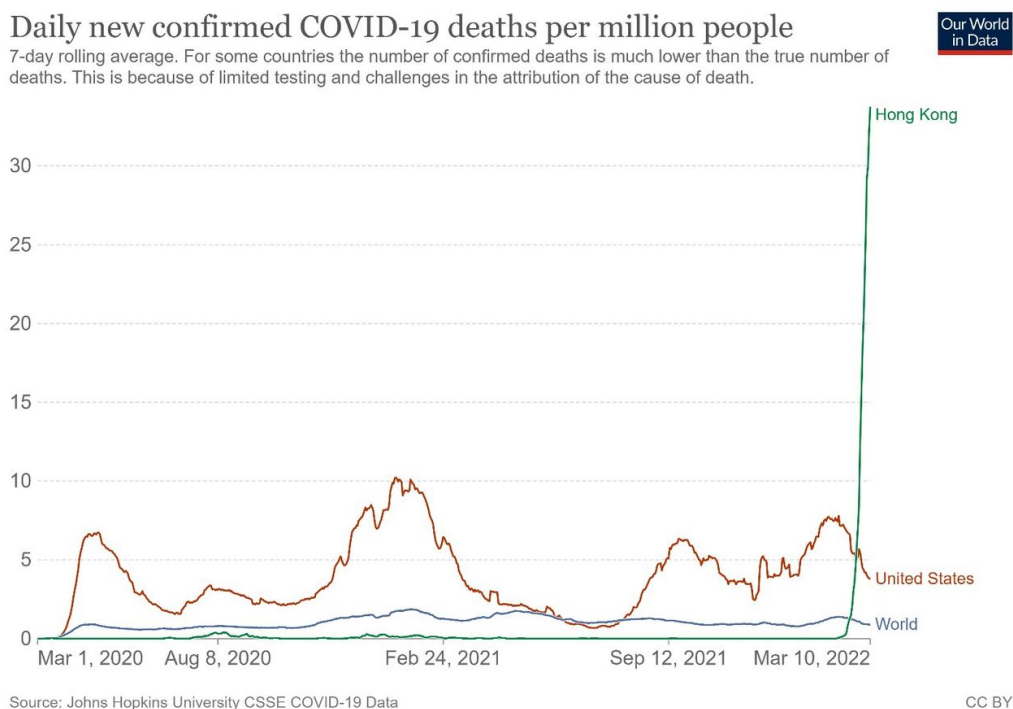
Recent studies from the University of Tokyo and Michigan State University on the BA.2 subvariant have confirmed that it is not only more contagious than its predecessor, BA.1, by 40 percent. It is about 30 percent more immune-evasive and can reinfect people who

had a prior infection with BA.1. Modeling studies predict that BA.2 will dominate globally, and there have been calls to give BA.2 a unique Greek letter.

As a case study, Denmark underscores the dangers posed by ignoring the threat BA.2 poses and lifting all mitigation measures to stem infections. The country boasts a fully vaccinated rate of 82 percent, and more than 60 percent of the population is boosted. It was also one of the first European countries where BA.2 came to dominate during this winter's surge of infections.

Denmark encountered the highest level of infections and deaths at any point in the pandemic. Like many countries, the official mantra was that the disease remained mild and mitigation measures were not required because a significant majority of the population had been vaccinated. This proved disastrous. The daily death rate continues its climb, reaching 45 per day. With a population of 5.83 million people, this is equivalent to 2,554 deaths a day in the US.

Hong Kong, the autonomous region in China, is a densely populated area with almost 7.5 million people that had kept the virus in check for nearly two years. It is now experiencing a massive, deadly deluge of infections, inundating hospitals and leading to the health system's collapse.



Daily new confirmed COVID-19 deaths per million Hong Kong vs. the US (Source: Our World in Data)

The seven-day average of daily deaths continues to climb, reaching 255 per day, and it has surpassed every other country, including Peru, on a per capita basis. An equivalent death toll in the US, on a per capita basis, would be more than 11,000 a day, almost three times higher than the winter of 2021 peak.

Cases in South Korea continue to spiral upwards, with more than 325,000 infections reported yesterday. Deaths are also rising exponentially. A similar situation is evolving in Vietnam, where daily cases have increased over 150,000 per day, and deaths follow.

These developments will significantly impact the US, which used the decline in cases coming off the Omicron peak to fast-track policies that have essentially ended all mitigation measures, including mask mandates in schools. Additionally, all funding for pandemic measures has quickly dried up despite hundreds of billions available for their war machines.

Meanwhile, BA.2 subvariant sequences have climbed four-fold to around 12 percent over the last month, highest in New York City, where the first wave of the COVID pandemic had such a devastating impact.

Instead of taking heed of these developments, New York City Mayor Eric Adams said it was time “to celebrate” again after removing all the mandates and strict COVID protocols. He added, “We are not going to allow COVID to define us. We’re far from out of the woods. COVID is still here. But we are beating it back!”

The only way to beat back the pandemic is through an elimination strategy to drive new infections to zero and not continue to play a dangerous game of social roulette with a constantly mutating virus.

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