

The 2024 Paris Olympics COVID-19 superspreader event

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The normalization of massive police presence targeting the working class in Paris during the 2024 Olympic games has gone hand in hand with the normalization of mass infection with COVID-19. At the Paris Olympics, all public health precautions have been cast to the wind.

Millions of people, including 2 million tourists from abroad, are expected to visit the various venues being held across France to watch 11,310 athletes from 206 countries competing in 48 different sporting events. More than 45,000 riot and military police are deployed on the ground, water and air, with helicopters, drones and snipers at the ready, placing Paris in a state of siege.

Before the games started, five of Australia's women water polo players tested positive for COVID-19. This was followed by several as yet unidentified members of the Belgian Olympic delegation. This led to mounting concerns among workers that the Olympics will lead to a massive superspreading event, particularly as mutations to the virus have accelerated transmission.

A group of volunteer workers at the Olympics issued a public statement on the *Médiapart* website threatening to resign en masse if public authorities did not address the COVID-19 threat. Demanding policies of masking, vaccination, ventilation and air purification, they wrote: "Covid-19 pandemic threat denial is not an antidote to contamination."

They added:

We have been enthusiastic in the preparation of the Games as international volunteers. However, we are more and more worried at the lack of any action from the organizers to address the epidemic of Covid-19 that is still going on across Europe and the world. We demand effective sanitary measures against the virus, to protect the inhabitants of Paris and Seine-Saint-Denis, the athletes, the public, and the volunteers. If no steps are taken, we will collectively resign of our assignments, and will not show up on the Olympic

and Paralympic sites we have been staffed.

While French authorities and the Olympic organizers have not acknowledged the COVID-19 threat, the same summer surge in France is well underway that has impacted neighboring countries since June, including Germany and Italy, as a result of waning population immunity. The impact of the virus at the recent Tour de France, which took place from the end of June to July 21, should be seen as a warning of things to come at the Olympics.

The entire event was plagued by COVID-19 infections among the elite riders, four of whom had to drop out to recover from their infections, while others continued to ride and place other competitors at risk. No protocols were established ahead of the multi-day racing event. Only near the end of the event, on July 14, did Amaury Sport Organization, the main organizer of the cycling event, ask journalists to don masks when interacting with the riders and their support staff.

Yet the Paris Olympics are proceeding without any significant public health safeguards, even after the catastrophic experience of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics that were postponed to 2021 due to the pandemic.

At that time, amid mass protests and concerns about the potential consequences of allowing the games to proceed, Olympic organizers held the event with hardly any spectators to watch the games, at a cost of \$6 billion in public money. Still, Japan saw a massive wave of infections that late summer and early fall. The Tokyo COVID-19 Monitoring Committee meeting held on August 20, 2021 warned: "Infections will rampage through the nation to a disastrous level. This is an emergency."

And indeed, after the 2021 Olympics, the surge of infections across Japan accelerated, and health authorities soon abandoned any pretense of trying to keep the Omicron strain from running rampant in the population. More than 80 percent of all the official 75,000 COVID-19 deaths in Japan occurred after the Olympics. This was in keeping with the

official practice, promoted in the United States by Anthony Fauci, of using the Omicron strain as a “live virus vaccine.”

The pandemic has claimed over 27 million excess deaths, and the number of people afflicted with Long COVID runs in the hundreds of millions. The current, utter contempt of the authorities for public health threatens disastrous consequences. Beyond the obvious implications to the population, elite athletes who have come to Paris to represent their countries in these sporting events face a formidable risk that an infection may very well end their hopes to compete or win a medal.

Indeed, a 2023 study in the *Annals of Medicine* found that aerobic performance of elite football players remained lowered for weeks after a COVID-19 infection, noting, “SARS-CoV-2 infection has been shown to induce capillary flow disturbances, which are shown to shorten blood transit times through the remaining, patent capillaries, thereby limiting oxygen uptake. So, these capillary disturbances are expected to reduce the endurance capacity of elite players.”

The contempt for the health and well-being of athletes and the broader public is inseparable from the grotesque social inequality of contemporary society. *Le Monde* provided a glimpse of the siege-like state forced on the population before the opening ceremony, writing:

More than 40,000 barriers lining the streets of Paris, security perimeters forbidding any access to the Seine without a QR code, hundreds of police and gendarmerie patrols, and closed metro stations: Rarely in peacetime has the French capital experienced such high levels of security.

The entire two-week sporting event will cost upwards of €9-10 billion, of which only a third will be covered by sponsors. The rest will be appropriated from the public, that is to say, in their large majority working people who will be forced to fork over their earnings to a spectacle to which they have not been invited or welcomed.

Marie Léon, a 38-year-old mother of two living near the Stade de France in the working class suburb of Saint Denis, bitterly told AP, “You will see, there will be police officers blocking us from getting there anyway. From my window, I can listen to the roars and cheers of the Stade de France. That will be the only way I’ll be included in the Olympics.”

Much has been made of the novel character of the setting for the Paris Olympics, which are taking place largely in the river Seine or in temporary facilities and seating built around the river. In reality, this choice also exposes the authorities’ complete contempt for the public.

Breaking with tradition of opening the Olympics in sporting venues, the opening ceremony for the Olympic Games was held as a boat parade down the Seine. Around 10,500 athletes boarded an armada of 85 boats at Pont d’Austerlitz, its name commemorating Napoleon Bonaparte’s military victory against Russian and Austrian forces in 1805. The boats sailed west for 6 kilometers before reaching the Trocadéro esplanade across the river from the Eiffel Tower, where the official protocols took place, and the Olympic cauldron was lit.

Along this scenic route, with the iconic Notre-Dame and the Louvre as backdrops, 320,000 spectators filling 124 grandstands were packed together for hours on Friday, despite rain that left them soaked.

After having attended a soirée at the Élysée Palace, more than 100 heads of state greeted the disembarking athletes amid performances by Céline Dion and Lady Gaga. US President Joe Biden, recovering from his third bout with COVID-19 at home under close medical observation, was substituted by his wife Jill. In all, more than 15,000 performers and behind-the-scenes technicians produced a gaudy spectacle on a budget of €120 million for the evening festivities.

For the athletes, however, the reliance on the heavily-polluted Seine River as a venue for the swimming portion of the triathlon event poses a major health threat. The spending of a whopping \$1.5 billion on building wastewater facilities to treat polluted water from storm surges failed to cleanse the river, with rain forcing officials to cancel a training session on Sunday. The Seine continues to present unsafe levels of bacteria, including *E. coli* and enterococcus that could produce dangerous illnesses in swimmers, but officials nevertheless plan to go ahead with the triathlon Tuesday.

Australian, Chinese and other teams announced they would design special treatments to administer to their swimmers to minimize the chances of contracting serious illnesses after participating in the Olympics.



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