London’s Imperial College predicts millions to die from coronavirus pandemic in UK and US

Bryan Dyne
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A study published Monday by the Imperial College, a public research university in London, estimates that millions will die from the coronavirus pandemic in the United Kingdom and United States. In their best-case scenario, in which transmission of the virus is massively mitigated, and “even if all patients were able to be treated,” the authors write, “we predict there would still be in the order of 250,000 deaths in GB, and 1.1–1.2 million in the US.”

According to the authors, Covid-19 “and the public health threat it represents is the most serious seen in a respiratory virus since the 1918 H1N1 influenza pandemic.” There are now 198,000 cases worldwide and nearly 8,000 deaths. The countries with the largest number of new cases include Italy, Iran, Spain, Germany, France and the United States.

The study was led by Neil Ferguson and included a team of people drawn from the Imperial College, as well as from the World Health Organization, MRC Centre for Global Infectious Disease Analysis and the Abdul Latif Jameel Institute for Disease and Emergency Analytics. In addition to the mass casualty figures, they estimated that the pandemic in the UK and US will continue through August.

They emphasize that “mitigation is unlikely to be feasible without emergency surge capacity limits of the UK and US health care systems being exceeded many times over.” The report makes clear that even in a short outbreak of the disease, “the surge limits for both general ward and ICU [intensive care unit] beds would be exceeded by at least eightfold under the more optimistic scenario for critical care requirements that we examined.” Under such circumstances, the United States could expect to see 56,100 deaths per day at its peak.

In other words, with the current policies in place by the Johnson and Trump administrations, millions of people, possibly tens of millions, are going to contract this disease and die, as hospitals, clinics and other medical facilities collapse in the face of the massive number of infected patients. Above all else, the refusal of either government to implement mass testing for the coronavirus early on in the crisis, as consistently implored by WHO, has allowed the virus to spread to large swathes of the population, with no signs of being halted.

As WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned, “You can’t fight a fire blindfolded, and we can’t stop this pandemic if we don’t know who is infected.”

The imminent dangers can be most clearly seen in the collapse of the Italian health care system, which has already been overwhelmed by 31,506 cases to date, up from just three less than a month ago. The death toll has reached at least 2,503 and is rising. If the mortality rates in Italy hold true for Britain and the United States—and the lack of public health infrastructure in both countries indicates that they will—the two countries will likely see actual death tolls of at least two million and 8.6 million respectively.

Moreover, the casualty figures do not account for collateral deaths related to HIV, cancer, myocardial infarction, stroke and other emergent illnesses, due to health care facilities being overwhelmed. Hospitals are already canceling clinics and surgical procedures in anticipation of a surge of respiratory illnesses due to the coronavirus.

The themes in the Imperial College paper were

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echoed Tuesday in comments to MSNBC's *Morning Joe* by Dr. Ashish Jha, the director of the Harvard Global Health Institute.

Dr. Jha called for a full quarantine across the United States. He stated, "Our hospitals and emergency rooms are not ready. We have two choices. Basically, we can either have a national quarantine now, [for] two weeks, [and] get a grip on where things are, then reassess.

"Or we cannot [and] wait another week and when things look really terrible, be forced into it and that's going to last much longer, [and] many more people will die. So those are really our two choices—get ahead of it or wait until we're even further behind." He added that "it's going to look like Italy" for such a quarantine to succeed.

US President Donald Trump's latest press conference, however, makes clear that the focus of the ruling elites of the major imperialist powers is not to save human lives but to protect the financial oligarchs in their own countries and internationally. Trump is currently pushing for a $600 billion stimulus package to go directly to businesses. He has also been advocating for a cut in payroll taxes, which is aimed at disguising the windfall for hedgefund managers and corporate executives by giving workers a small increase in take-home pay—while at the same time undermining the funding of Social Security and Medicare.

There is also a further $250 billion supposedly directed toward the broader population, though Congress is still haggling over the exact amount and method of distribution. Even if the proposal passes and workers receive $1,000 each, this is utterly inadequate to cover the needs of millions who are facing weeks or months of no wages as the pandemic shuts down large portions of the economy.

At that same briefing, Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin announced yet another program that "will enable the Fed to guarantee the purchase of… commercial paper going forward. That is a $1 trillion dollar market." While the initial sum set aside for such purchases is only $10 billion, Mnuchin made clear, "We have the ability to have the Fed purchase up to $1 trillion of commercial paper, if needed." In the past week, this brings the total wealth being supplied by the Trump administration to Wall Street, through corporate bailouts, direct infusion into the stock exchange and other methods, to $3.8 trillion.

Less than half of that amount could have been used to forgive all student loan debt. The rest could have been used to pay off all credit card debt and auto debt for every worker in America. It could have been used to manufacture and distribute hundreds of millions of masks for doctors and patients fighting the coronavirus, along with tens of millions of gowns and hundreds of thousands of ventilators and ICU beds for critical patients. Hundreds of new hospitals with 500 beds each could have been built in weeks to care for and isolate those infected. Testing for the millions of people who might be infected could have been facilitated and the pandemic contained.

Markets responded to the latest round of cash handed to private coffers by rising five percent. Workers, on the other hand, face destitution and disease.

As the National Committee of the Socialist Equality Party (US) wrote: "An enormous amount of time has been lost, but the impact and extent of the pandemic depends on urgent responses that can be taken now. This response must be centered on two absolutely critical priorities: first, to contain the spread of the virus as much as possible, and second, given that it has already acquired global dimensions, to provide emergency care for all who are ill and emergency assistance to all that are affected."

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls on workers and young people to join the fight against this pandemic and in defense of workers' rights through the building of an international socialist and revolutionary movement. It is the central question of our time and a matter of life and death.

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