

Michigan's confirmed COVID-19 cases surge past 10,000 as Democratic officials attempt to deflect responsibility

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The number of reported COVID-19 cases in Michigan surged to 10,791 on Thursday as the state's death toll rose to 417. The vast majority of cases are in the Detroit metropolitan area.

The largest city in the state, Detroit, had 2,858 cases and 101 deaths. Suburban Wayne County had 2,221 cases while Oakland County and Macomb County, which contain the northern Detroit suburbs, had 2,183 and 1,332 cases respectively.

Nationally Michigan was nearly even with California for the third largest total of COVID-19 cases in the US but led California in the number of deaths. Those communities hardest impacted are some of the poorest in the state, including Detroit, which has the highest percentage of residents living in poverty of any major US city.

One factor in the high infection rate in Michigan was the delay by state officials in issuing a stay-at-home order. Wealthy business interests in the state, in the first place the auto industry, insisted on keeping workers in the factories as long as possible even after the extent of the pandemic was well apparent. The auto plants were only closed after workers took wildcat strike action in a number of major plants.

In a town hall meeting Thursday evening, Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer, a Democrat, attempted to cover up the record of her administration, demagogically assuring residents "we are all in this together." She called for shared sacrifice, appealing to national patriotism and evoking memories of WWII and the role of Detroit as the supposed "arsenal of democracy."

Whitmer also announced Thursday that schools in the state would remain closed through the end of the

current school year. Earlier in the week the governor declared a state of disaster and extended the state of emergency. She requested the legislature pass a concurrent resolution extending the state of disaster and state of emergency for 70 days.

The governor evaded a question at the town hall about the dangerous spread of coronavirus in Michigan prisons. As of Thursday, 148 prisoners being held by the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) had tested positive for COVID-19.

Despite the crowded and unsanitary conditions in prisons that make social distancing impossible and create a breeding ground for coronavirus and other diseases, only 120 prisoners out of the state's total prison population of 38,000 were released this week through the normal parole procedure. Under terms of the state's brutal "truth in sentencing law" that require that prisoners serve 100 percent of minimum sentences, MDOC says it cannot release prisoners early, even to protect life.

In response to the outraged wife of an auto parts worker, who was being forced to work even though his job was non-essential, Whitmer feigned concern, but offered nothing but a pious moral appeal to employers to "do the right thing."

Like Whitmer, Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan is attempting to divert attention from the role of his administration and the Democratic Party in the deplorable situation confronting workers in the city. In a press briefing Wednesday, Duggan denied that Detroit's high poverty rate had any connection to the high infection rate in the city.

Health experts have cited the city's poverty rate, including the large numbers of people without health

insurance, many suffering from serious medical conditions, as a significant factor in the heavy impact of the pandemic on Detroit. One study found that 14.5 percent of Detroit adults have asthma, compared with 10.7 percent statewide. Detroit residents also have higher incidence of kidney disease. Both can be factors in COVID-19 mortality.

Compounding the health crisis, more than 2,500 Detroit households are still without running water due to the Duggan administration's brutal shutoff policy instituted in the wake of the 2013 Detroit bankruptcy. With the surge in coronavirus cases Duggan and Whitmer belatedly announced that the city would restore all water service, but so far only several hundred homes have had their water reconnected.

In an effort to divert attention from the abysmal social conditions in the city, Duggan suggested that Detroit's high number of COVID-19 cases was due to the widespread testing being carried out. While a testing center was opened at the old Michigan Fairgrounds, a resident must first obtain a doctor's order to get a test. A high portion of Detroit residents lack access to a primary care doctor.

The obstacles to obtaining testing were tragically illustrated by the death of a 25-year-old Western Michigan University student. Bassey Offiong, a student of Nigerian descent who grew up in Detroit, had initially been denied testing several times for COVID-19 before being admitted in grave condition to Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak. Weeks away from achieving a degree in chemical engineering, Offiong instead spent the last two weeks of his life on a ventilator.

Illustrating the dangers that workers face in the city and the lack of adequate protections, a Detroit city bus driver, Jason Hargrove, died Wednesday of COVID-19. Hargrove had posted a video online warning of the hazards that bus drivers face due to close public contact. Detroit bus drivers staged a protest last month over the lack of protection from coronavirus.

With Detroit developing as one of the epicenters of the coronavirus pandemic, the US Army Corps of Engineers has begun the conversion of the TCF Center downtown into a quarantined makeshift hospital with 1,000 beds to deal with the crush of cases. The pandemic has already overwhelmed Detroit area hospitals. In an effort to recruit staff the state has issued

a call for volunteers and relaxed interstate medical licensing regulations. A spokesman for the Whitmer administration indicated that more such hospitals are likely.

At the same time, this week Detroit became one of the first localities to implement testing for COVID-19 with a new device that can return test results in as little as 5 minutes. The standard test can take five days or longer to return results. The new testing device, about the size of a small kitchen appliance, was developed by Abbott Laboratories and just approved by federal regulators, setting off a scramble among states and cities for access.

In an indication of the unplanned and chaotic response of US authorities at all levels to the pandemic, according to a report in the *Washington Post*, Mayor Duggan secured a personal commitment for 5 machines and 5,000 tests via an early Sunday morning phone call to Abbott CEO Miles White. The city has unilaterally decided to prioritize testing for police, firefighters and bus drivers, not those residents showing symptoms. Those whose tests are negative will be cleared to return to work. Some 500 Detroit cops are currently quarantined.



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