

UK university team predicts doubling or tripling of US death toll over the next two months

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A report issued yesterday by the Imperial College COVID-19 Response Team offers a startling analysis of the expansion of the pandemic in the United States as a result of the rapid resumption of social and economic activity demanded by the Trump administration and big business, predicting the death toll by the end of July could reach 2–3 times what it is today, or nearly 300,000 lives lost.

The Imperial College report estimates the national prevalence of coronavirus at 4.1 percent of the population, with wide variations between states, adding:

“Our estimates suggest that the epidemic is not under control in much of the US: as of 17 May 2020, the reproduction number is above the critical threshold (1.0) in 24 states. Higher reproduction numbers are geographically clustered in the South and Midwest, where epidemics are still developing, while we estimate lower reproduction numbers in states that have already suffered high COVID-19 mortality, such as the Northeast. These estimates suggest that caution must be taken in loosening current restrictions if effective additional measures are not in place.”

They write that with the relaxation of social distancing, the community transmission will accelerate again. They estimate that over a period of two months, the cumulative deaths could be 2–3 times higher than present numbers holding all things constant. They also highlight that the US needs to establish a robust public health program where rapid testing, contact tracing and vigilance to social behaviors can offset the resurgence with the “loosening of social distancing.”

In their summary, they remark, “Overall, we show that while all US states have substantially reduced their

reproduction numbers, we find no evidence that any state is approaching herd immunity or that its epidemic is close to over.”

The US presently has over 1.6 million cases, with over 25,000 new cases yesterday. The number of fatalities is expected to exceed 100,000 by this weekend. Many in the media have taken note of the uptick in the daily deaths which have exceeded 1,000 over the last four straight days. The *Financial Times* also makes the same observation as the Imperial College report, that the reproduction rate in half of the states is over the value of one, which indicates the pandemic is growing and would accelerate in these regions. The highest rates recorded are in Arizona, Colorado and Texas.

The mayor of Montgomery, Alabama, said at a news conference on Wednesday, “Right now, if you’re from Montgomery, and you need an ICU bed, you’re in trouble.” Republican Governor Kay Ivey had allowed businesses and churches to reopen this month.

President Trump delivered remarks on Thursday afternoon at the Ford Rawsonville Components Plant in Ypsilanti, Michigan, in an attempt to shore up his standing in the critical re-election state where he trails Democrat Joe Biden according to most polls. His fascistic speech continued to inflame Chinese-US relations by blaming the Chinese government for the pandemic.

However, his attempt to position himself as the champion of the auto workers, by sending them back to work, is a deadly dangerous proposition for the working class. Factories, warehouses and office buildings provide the perfect environment for the resurgence of COVID-19. This time, however, there

will be no call for another lockdown if deaths surge.

On Wednesday, all 50 states had started the process of lifting restrictions, not because conditions have by any measure improved, or because guidance provided by health experts suggests it is now safe to return to work, but purely by the need to restore the profit-making capacity of corporate America.

The Wall Street forecasting firm, HIS Markit, is predicting that the US gross domestic product in the second quarter will sink by 40 percent. According to some estimates, half of all small businesses will be out of cash within a month. Jonathan Parker, a professor of finance at MIT, told CNBC, “If a second wave of infections hits, we will be coming out of a bad GDP shutdown with a high unemployment rate and a debt-to-GDP ratio greater than 100 percent and projected deficits for this year are already \$5,000 per American household. A second wave of infections would be, I think, an even more major economic disaster than the current one.”

In their attempt to pry open the economy, there is also a simultaneous effort to suppress the real statistics of the pandemic that people have been following carefully to make sense of the magnitude of the disaster. The firing of Rebekah Jones in Florida, a scientist who created the coronavirus tracking database for the state, was not an exception but standard operating procedure to censor this information.

In an article published on Tuesday, headlined, “States accused of manipulating COVID-19 statistics to make the situation look better,” the Associated Press wrote, “As large parts of the US ease their lockdown against the coronavirus, public health officials in some states are being accused of bungling infection statistics or even deliberately using a little sleight of hand to make things look better than they are.” Virginia, Texas, Vermont and Georgia have been cited as states involved in such charlatanry.

By way of an example, Georgia, one of the earliest states to lift restrictions, published a graph implying declining COVID-19 cases in the most affected counties. However, these entries were arranged in descending magnitude instead of chronological order. This was done to suggest a two-week downward deflection in their numbers. Georgia State Representative Jasmine Clark, who has a doctorate in microbiology, aptly called the graph a “prime example

of malfeasance. Science matters and data manipulation is not only dangerous but leads to distrust in our institutions.”

In an attempt to provide a veneer of expertise, the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Robert Redfield, gave press briefings on Tuesday, assuring reporters that the country is ready to open. Without any credible evidence or scientific rationale, he suggested that the present spread of the coronavirus in the southern hemisphere is based on seasonal variations and warned that “the US would have to increase its disease-tracking capabilities rapidly in the next few months to avoid another public health crisis as seasonal flu coincides with a second wave of COVID-19.”

He also admitted he had no real concern that several states were moving faster than his guidelines indicated. Yet, by his admission, the CDC presently lacks the infrastructure for a modernized data system as well as the ability to monitor contact tracing and vaccine distribution. According to Redfield, the states are required to present a plan by the end of May for continued testing and contact tracing.

The CDC is looking to increase contact tracing personnel across the nation by between 30,000 and 100,000. But how many contact tracers there are remains unknown in the United States, because of the fractured and decentralized character of its underfunded public health systems. However, Redfield’s assertion that “the federal government will likely need to invest anywhere between an additional \$3 trillion to \$6 trillion in preparations to combat a potential second wave” is an admission of the alarming scale of the coming “second wave,” for which neither the federal government nor any of the states are prepared. Under the policy of seeking “herd immunity,” the working class is being sent to be slaughtered.



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