

Two Florida teenagers die from COVID-19 as schools push to reopen

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Two teenagers in Florida—a 16-year-old female from Miami-Dade County and a 17-year-old male from Manatee County—were added to Florida’s COVID-19 death toll on Monday, according to the Florida Department of Health.

The deaths come a month after a 9-year-old, Kimora Lynam, from Putman County became the youngest child to die from COVID-19 in Florida.

As of Monday, 38,171 people under 18 had tested positive for the virus in the state, making Florida one of the states with the largest percentage of child infections. As of this writing, 394 children are currently hospitalized from the virus.

Health records of the two teens indicate that neither was considered a travel-related case. Both children were hospitalized during their battle with the illness. The 17-year-old boy died on Sunday at Johns Hopkins All Children’s hospital in St. Petersburg. He is the first person under the age of 18 to have died from COVID-19 in Manatee County.

The 16-year-old girl died on July 29 at Nicklaus Children’s Hospital in Miami, according to the Miami-Dade County Medical Examiner Department. The young girl had two preexisting conditions, spina bifida and hydrocephalus. She died of pneumonia brought on by COVID-19, according to official reports.

The deaths of these young people come as public schools and universities in Florida and across the country are moving ahead with plans to resume in-person learning. The rise in COVID-19 fatalities and cases over the past several weeks point to the disaster that awaits millions of teachers, students and families if the back-to-school measures are allowed to be pushed through.

In an interview on CNN on Monday, Florida Education Association President Fedrick Ingram spoke about the harmful psychological effects that will undoubtedly affect children if they are permitted to enter schools where sickness and death become commonplace. He called the deaths of the two minors “tragic” and something that would be “part of what we are going to have to deal with as well when you talk about student and children’s mental health.”

America’s ruling class would like the population to believe that schools can be transformed into safe spaces for regular classroom learning in order to facilitate their homicidal back-to-work drive and force working-class parents who can’t afford to leave their children at home back to work in unsafe conditions. The official notion is that younger people are largely excluded from the virus and aren’t likely to transmit it, let alone become infected. However, a mountain of evidence dealing with the nature of coronavirus transmission reveals that this is a blatant lie.

Health experts noted back in the early stages of the pandemic that younger demographics were accounting for a sizable portion of hospitalizations.

Dr. Rochelle Walensky, chief of infectious diseases at Massachusetts General Hospital and a professor of medicine at Harvard, told reporters as far back as early April that even young patients without underlying health conditions were getting sick as the pandemic raged on. She noted that it was impossible to determine whose health would or would not deteriorate after contracting the virus. “One day they’re okay, the next day they require intubation,” she said.

One nurse at Elmhurst Hospital in New York City spoke to the WSWs in April on the conditions within the hospital. At a time when the pandemic was spiraling out of control in the state of New York, with around 30,000 daily infections being reported at its peak, observers were particularly struck by the number of young people who were checking into the hospital infected with COVID-19 and dying. Speaking of her patients, the nurse said: “I’ve never seen so many young people die. It’s terrible. We’re totally unprepared for this.”

Recent data has pointed to a drastic surge of infections among small children and adolescents throughout the course of the pandemic. The American Academy of Pediatrics and the Children’s Hospital Association released a report Monday documenting an extensive compilation of data from states on child COVID-19 cases. They found that while children represented only 8.8 percent of all cases in states reporting cases by age, over 338,982 have tested positive for COVID-19 since the onset of the pandemic. The overall rate

for COVID-19 among children is 447 cases per 100,000 in the population. Moreover, 97,078 new child cases were reported from July 16 to July 30, a staggering 40 percent increase from the previous period.

Young people are increasingly catching the virus in states that are witnessing an immense surge in the pandemic. Alongside tens of thousands of child infections, Florida passed the 500,000 confirmed case mark earlier this week and saw 245 new deaths on Wednesday.

The Florida Department of Health issued a sobering data analysis last week on pediatric cases.

The data showed that from July 16 to July 24, nearly 8,000 more children have contracted the virus, which represents a 34 percent increase from the previous week. This came after another recent report showed that more children in Florida are requiring hospitalizations than ever before. Over the course of eight days, hospitalizations have increased by 23 percent, bringing the total number of children hospitalized to over 300. The percent positive rate for children also increased by 1 percentage point from the week before to 14.4 percent, while the state's overall positivity rate is 12.6 percent.

Despite these alarming developments which are showcasing the danger of sending children back into schools, Republican Governor Ron DeSantis has continued to push a reckless reopening campaign. In a press conference with Vice President Mike Pence last Monday, he reiterated platitudes on the importance of in-person learning. "I really believe that the teachers and the administrators that are there, they serve so many functions in the lives of our kids, particularly those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds."

DeSantis and other proponents of the back-to-school drive have consistently touted the low transmission rate among children as an excuse to send them back into classrooms. However, a study in South Korea last month has poured cold water over such claims. Researchers found that children aged between 10 and 19 can transmit COVID-19 within a household just as much as adults.

Additionally, the researchers noted that the highest COVID-19 rate for household contacts of school-age children and the lowest rates for children younger than 9 was in the middle of school closures. They highlight the fact that early school closures, which were a part of broader lockdown procedures, greatly reduced the rate of transmission among younger children. "Although the detection rate for contacts of preschool-aged children was lower, young children may show higher attack rates when the school closure ends, contributing to community transmission of Covid-19," the study said.

For all counties suffering the most severe outbreaks of the

virus in Florida, child infection rates were much higher. The test positivity rate for children in Martin County was 25.3 percent while further south in Miami-Dade County the rate was 19.6 percent.

The rise in infections among children has been evident in other states that have become hotspots for COVID-19 as well. In Texas, for example, there has been an astronomical rise in COVID-19 infections and deaths ever since it lifted lockdown measures and resumed non-essential production. Small children have not been spared from the surge and, in some cases, have tested positive at rates even higher than the elderly.

In early July, Texas Health and Human Services unveiled data showing that around 592 children at child daycare centers across the state had tested positive for COVID-19. More than 1,200 staff members in these daycare facilities have also tested positive, bringing the total to nearly 1,800 across 1,131 facilities. For the child cases, this amounts to a 759 percent increase since early June.

The evidence is overwhelmingly clear: Children are equally susceptible to catching COVID-19, have viral loads equal to or greater than adults, are more likely to be asymptomatic carriers, and transmit the virus at the highest rates of any age group. Any school that reopens will quickly become a major vector for the spread of the virus throughout that community.

The effort to reopen schools, in other words, means that we will see more and more preventable and harrowing deaths of youth, students, teachers, parents and other workers.

The past seven months have demonstrated that the fight against the pandemic depends upon the independent intervention of the working class. The Socialist Equality Party and its youth and student wing, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, call on young people to join their teachers in opposing the homicidal back to work campaign. We urge teachers to contact us for assistance in organizing your struggle. We call on students and youth to support this struggle and join the IYSSE.



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