

US coronavirus death toll predicted to reach 295,000 by December

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The latest projection from the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington estimates that 295,011 people will have died from the coronavirus pandemic in the United States by December 1. This figure is almost double the current tally, which stands after yesterday at more than 164,000.

Chris Murray, the lead researcher on the project, noted in an interview with National Public Radio that the coming onset of fall and winter weather played a large role in the IHME's projection. "November is a month when we expect the increase of transmission due to seasonality will start to be stronger," he said. "We would see approximately a 50 percent increase in transmission, everything else being the same."

While Murray's team does not publish this figure, the doubling of deaths over the next four months also implies a doubling of cases in the US to about 10 million by the end of the year, up from the current count of nearly 5.1 million cases. Worldwide, there are currently 19.5 confirmed cases of the coronavirus, 6.2 million of which are currently active, and more than 720,000 deaths.

The model has two additional projections: one involving mass mask wearing and another where social distancing restrictions are eased. In the former scenario, if 95 percent of Americans wear a mask, the number of graves that need to be dug will rise by "only" 64,000. In the latter scenario, including sending potentially infected children back to school, the number of men, women and children dead will soar to 391,723.

Such a drastic increase in the death toll further exposes the lie by President Donald Trump that it is safe to reopen schools. This homicidal policy is, however, not limited to Trump and the Republicans. The Democrats are fully complicit in the rush to reopen

the schools even as the pandemic rages out of control, just as Democratic governors and mayors have overseen the reopening of businesses and the campaign to force workers back to work without any real protection from the virus.

The essential unity of both parties in forcing workers to resume pumping out profits for the corporations and banks was underscored Friday by New York Governor Andrew Cuomo's announcement encouraging the reopening of schools across the state, including in New York City.

As teachers, students and parents are very aware, the pandemic is not abating and opening schools will result in a vast increase in the transmission of the virus, endangering the lives of the students as well as their teachers and family members. The suffering and death caused by the premature reopening of workplaces across the country will be revisited by the Trump administration on the nation's children.

These grim figures are coming from what has been generally treated by the White House as the definitive projection model. The IHME (funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation) and Chris Murray first rose to prominence at the end of March when they predicted that the peak of the disease would be April 15 and that 84,000 would ultimately die. The methodology was heavily criticized at the time and ultimately shown to be a vast underestimation of both the deadliness and duration of the pandemic. In that same vein, their current scenarios are likely lower limits on the true scale of what is to come.

In addition, there are a variety of societal impacts of the disease not measured by the IHME model. As early as March, researchers noted that a significant percentage of survivors of COVID-19 in China had developed persistent heart, lung and brain damage. In

the ensuing months, this has been borne out, as more studies reveal that even those with no or mild symptoms can develop coronavirus-related blood clots, muscle weakness, fatigue, strokes and liver and kidney failure. For every patient who dies from the coronavirus, dozens more suffer from a myriad of long-term medical conditions that may plague them for months, years or even the rest of their lives.

Nor is there any accounting of how many have died from other deadly illnesses or conditions. During the height of the pandemic in New York City, dozens of people were found dead in their homes from strokes or heart attacks because the medical system was unable to reach them amid the deluge of severe and critical coronavirus cases that emerged over several weeks.

Others were prevented from getting cancer treatments and other lifesaving procedures, resulting in even more so-called excess deaths. It is likely that the real death toll as a result of the pandemic is 50 percent higher than what is officially reported.

The coordinator for the White House Coronavirus Task Force, Dr. Deborah Birx, has also warned of an increase of coronavirus cases in the coming weeks. Nine cities—Portland, Omaha, Kansas City, Chicago, Detroit, Atlanta, Washington DC, Baltimore and Boston—as well as California’s Central Valley region are all seeing an increase in the number of tests that are returned positive, indicating that the virus is entrenched and spreading in even more areas of the country.

Birx noted in a leaked phone call with state and local officials on Wednesday that “Although we’re seeing improvements in some of the red states and some of the states have actually moved from being in a red category—that was more than 10 percent test positivity—to under 10 percent, Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia moved back into the yellow states status.” This is also reflected in data from CovidExitStrategy.org, which shows that 30 states have “uncontrolled spread of the disease.”

Dr. Anthony Fauci, a top US expert on infectious diseases, concurred with Birx in an interview with CNN. “What Dr. Birx is saying,” he said, “is now is the time to accelerate the fundamental preventative measures that we all talk about: masks, social distancing, avoiding crowds, outdoors greater than indoors, washing hands, et cetera.” He continued, “Those kinds of simple things can actually prevent that

uptick from becoming a surge. So, she was warning the states and the cities to be careful, because this is a predictor of trouble ahead.”

What neither mentioned is the disastrous role reopening factories and plants has played in driving up the case numbers in the states mentioned. Auto plants in Kentucky have been some of the major vectors of transmission after they were reopened with only token safety measures in May. Recent data from the Tennessee Department of Health has revealed that more than 7,500 children between the ages of 5 and 18 have been diagnosed with COVID-19 in the months since the state lifted social distancing restrictions.

These are the essential “superspreader events,” a term coined by Birx, which have caused such a sharp rise in cases over the past month. While parties and large gatherings are certainly a way for the disease to jump from person to person, those are encouraged and made possible by the muddled, improvisational and piecemeal approach to reopening by local, state and federal officials. Instead of a comprehensive and coordinated national lockdown to halt the pandemic in its tracks, the piecemeal approach approved by Trump allowed states to lock down (or not) on their own timetable. As a result, since May 1, when states began reopening, 4 million cases and 96,000 deaths have been recorded in the US.



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