

With tens of millions facing eviction in US

CDC issues emergency order pushing mass evictions off until January

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The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued an emergency order Tuesday which will temporarily halt evictions for many Americans.

The order, which immediately came into effect, makes it a criminal offense to evict a person who signs a declaration that, among other things, they cannot afford rent and make less than \$99,000 a year as an individual, or double that amount for a couple filing taxes jointly.

The order lasts until January 1, 2021. Critically, it does not reduce rent payments, nor cancel fees, penalties, or interest. During the moratorium, rent and fees will accrue as usual, leaving many renters with a massive bill in the new year.

In order to avoid eviction under the new CDC orders, the individual or family must legally affirm, under penalty of perjury, a list of things. In addition to not making more than \$99,000 a year as an individual, or \$198,000 a year as a joint-filer, renters must declare that they have used their best efforts to obtain government assistance and that they cannot pay their full rent due to layoff or medical expense.

Additionally, they must declare that they are doing their “best efforts to make timely partial payments” and that they understand that the full rent will still be due, including with late fees, etc. Finally, they must declare that they would “likely become homeless” or move into housing with closer quarters should they get evicted.

The full text of the CDC’s decree can be accessed [here](#).

Experts have criticized the contract both for its vagueness and legal consequences. National Housing Law Project director Eric Dunn told *Slate* magazine, “[E]specially with the order being very clear about the

kinds of penalties that people could face if they make a false statement, a lot of people will be erring on the side of caution. I do think these kinds of things will deter people from being able to take advantage of it, which is unfortunate.”

The decision by the Trump Administration to issue this pause is bound up with the November election and the staggering social and health crises facing the working class.

The CDC order explicitly warns, “In the absence of State and local protections, as many as 30-40 million people in American could be at risk of eviction. A wave of evictions on that scale would be unprecedented in modern times.”

Thirty to forty million people is about ten percent of the American population. The estimate, which comes from a report by the Aspen Institute, also does not include millions of Americans who are at risk of being evicted from homes for non-payment of mortgages. According to mortgage analytics firm Black Knight, 3.9 million *households* were not paying their mortgages as of late August.

As the CDC notes, the potential for mass evictions will greatly exacerbate the COVID-19 pandemic “because homelessness increases the likelihood of individuals moving into close quarters in congregate settings.” Likewise, homeless people are more likely to have health issues that make them more at risk for contracting the virus.

It is in this context of a “wave of evictions ... unprecedented in modern times,” that the Trump Administration seeks to offset this catastrophe until after the election. What would happen if millions, if not tens of millions, of new homeless Americans were

added to the already explosive social, political, and epidemiological situation in the country?

While millions of Americans will welcome not being kicked out of their homes for a few more months, the order does nothing to solve the underlying situation—if anything, it sets the stage for a deeper, more explosive crisis once the money becomes due.

Diane Yentel, CEO of the National Low Income Housing Coalition, spoke to National Public Radio. “While an eviction moratorium is an essential step,” she said, “it is a half-measure that extends a financial cliff for renters to fall off of when the moratorium expires and back rent is owed.”

The depth of the eviction crisis was expressed in a CNN news report of Houston evictions that went viral on Wednesday. Reporter Kyung Lah speaks to a man hired to evict an elderly woman, “today it’s her,” he says, breaking out in tears, “tomorrow it’s me.” According to Lah, 200 eviction orders had come through the Harris County, Texas, courts *last week*. Before COVID-19, the county averaged 100 *a month*.

Palmer Heenan, a member of the Central Virginia Legal Aid Society, told the *Washington Post*, “Eviction has always been seen as a problem for low-income people, but I think there’s an extent to which this is now impacting people who are middle class. Increasingly I’m seeing folks like nurses, firefighters, police officers and accountants.”

The eviction crisis is just one side of a general breakdown of social life caused by the wholly incompetent response of American capitalism to the pandemic.

On Wednesday, Bloomberg published a report on hunger in the United States that found that 50 million Americans—about one-sixth of the entire population—will struggle with being unable to afford enough to eat this year. This is up by 45 percent year-on-year.

This week’s jobs report likewise shows that half of the 29 million Americans receiving unemployment compensation are doing so under the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program. The PUA gives unemployment benefits to those who would not normally qualify for benefits, such as gig economy workers and other part-time, self-employed workers. These benefits will also expire for these fourteen million, or so, workers at the turn of the new year.

Throughout schools and universities, teachers and students are protesting the homicidal back-to-school campaign, waging sickouts as university and school systems force students and teachers into inherently unsafe and deadly in-person instruction. Workers face a catch-22: either mass layoffs, as in the case of 19,000 American Airlines employees, or COVID-19-infected assembly lines, as in the case of Fiat Chrysler workers.

Meanwhile, August was the best month for stock market growth in almost a half century (since 1986), even though 30,000 Americans died of the virus. While workers are dying at their jobs, the wealth of the billionaires and multi-millionaires, bound up with the stock market, has soared.

These incomprehensibly large monetary gains are the result of unprecedented government intervention, not to help the hungry, underpaid, precarious mass of people, but to stuff the stock markets full of cash. These historic Federal Reserve policies have likewise decreased the value of the dollar by more than five percent this year—rendering workers’ wages less valuable as goods inflate in price, further adding to the social crisis.



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