

Teen in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania linked to 40 new COVID-19 cases

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Officials from Allegheny County Health Department reported September 2 that 40 COVID-19 cases over a two-week period had been traced back to one teenager. This revelation by health officials is a deadly warning about the ability of COVID-19 to spread throughout the county that includes the city of Pittsburgh as it prepares to open for in-person learning on September 9.

As part of a monthly department briefing, Dr. Debra Bogen, the health department director, said, “This teenager developed symptoms and within two weeks ... it had spread to family members, to the coworkers of family members, to other people in that teen’s community.”

According to the data, the teen—who was not named—began showing symptoms on August 14. In subsequent days, individuals the teen had interacted with began to show symptoms of the virus. These people went on to spread the virus to another layer of people before the spread was able to be identified and contained. As a result, 40 people contracted COVID-19, including two elderly individuals.

In the monthly department briefing, Bogen elaborated on the now well-known fact that young people are just as capable of spreading the virus as adults: “You start out with young, healthy people who get the infection and, unfortunately, they spread it to more vulnerable populations.”

Furthermore, health officials reiterated that young people are themselves not immune to the effects of the virus. In fact, there have been 14 children in the county who have needed hospitalization because of COVID-19, two of whom had to be placed in intensive care units.

While it is true that youth are statistically less likely than adults to have fatal complications from the virus, many young people who contract it require

hospitalizations and some die. In addition, hundreds of very young children have become extremely sick with an inflammatory disease after contracting the virus.

The level of spread that took place from just one unknowing teenager gives an indication of what is to come if the schools in Allegheny County go forward with plans to reopen on September 9. Many schools in the district have either announced plans to include an in-person option within the first week or have failed to publicly update their plans for school reopening since early August.

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Health, there were 105 new confirmed cases in Allegheny County and 257 new cases in Philadelphia between August 27 and September 2. Over the same time, there have been 1,160 cases of COVID-19 across Pennsylvania, bringing the total number of COVID-19 cases throughout the state to 136,771 with 7,732 deaths.

Under conditions in which the virus continues to rapidly spread throughout the country, Pennsylvania Democratic Governor Tom Wolf has made the reopening of schools a top priority.

On top of this reckless policy, Wolf also announced on Wednesday a revision to the state’s previous COVID-19 guidelines regarding high school sports. Wolf will now allow spectators at the high school and youth sporting events as long as the venue adheres to social distancing guidelines. The governor is attempting to distance himself from the policy by issuing a “strong recommendation” that they are postponed, even though he was the one ultimately responsible for changing the policy.

The administration wrote in a public statement, “As with deciding whether students should return to in-person classes, remote learning, or a blend of the two this fall, school administrators and locally elected

school boards should make decisions on sports.”

The drive to reopen schools throughout Pennsylvania has prompted widespread opposition from teachers and faculty who are unwilling to needlessly risk the health and safety of their students and themselves.

In late August, the East Pennsboro School board was forced to agree to a policy of all online learning after large numbers of teachers attempted to avoid returning to schools by taking a sabbatical or obtaining medical waivers.

Katelynn Edgar, a district spokeswoman, told the *Patriot-News*, “The stark reality is that we did not have enough qualified teachers and aids comfortable teaching face-to-face with students to begin school.”

Other school districts in Pennsylvania—including Central Bucks School District, East Penn School District, Mount Lebanon School District and Beaver Area School District—all agreed to transition to remote learning because of a shortage of teachers.

Peters Township School District, located in Washington County on the southwest border of Allegheny County, had to halt in-person classes just two days after school started on August 24 because someone at the school had tested positive for COVID-19. In a letter on August 31, the district reported another two presumptive COVID-19 cases. Despite the clear danger, the district announced that in-person classes would resume on September 8.

The dangers confronting students, parents, teachers and other education workers in Pennsylvania are the same issues facing educators throughout the country and, in fact, internationally. The homicidal drive to reopen schools is a central pillar of the Trump administration’s campaign to get workers back to businesses and factories. While the Democrats and Republicans may have tactical differences over how this policy is discussed and presented, they fundamentally agree on the conclusion: the schools must open.

Democratic Governor Tom Wolf is one of many Democratic Governors throughout the country, including Andrew Cuomo in New York and Gretchen Whitmer in Michigan, who are forcing the reopening of schools.

This homicidal policy has resulted in a growing movement of opposition from workers, parents and young people. Last week teachers, parents and students

in Kenosha, Wisconsin held a demonstration outside of the Kenosha Unified School District office in opposition to in-person learning. Teachers in Andover, Massachusetts, and Elizabeth, New Jersey have also voiced that they will refuse to work if the district demands they resume in-person teaching.

Last month, teachers from around the country established the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee to unite educators, parents, and students and prepare for a general strike to halt the reckless opening of schools. Safety committees, which are independent of the unions, are being set up in Michigan, Florida, Texas and other states.

The Socialist Equality Party urges teachers, parents, and students who are concerned about the rapid spread of COVID-19 in schools should **register** for the next meeting of the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee, which will be held Saturday, September 12, at 3 p.m.



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