Global coronavirus death projections point to policy of herd immunity being pursued with impunity

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On September 4, the number of new cases of COVID-19 surpassed 300,000 globally for the first time. After a brief peak in mid-August, the seven-day running average is climbing again, with over 267,500 infections each day. There have been over 27 million cases since the start of the pandemic in December 2019, a period of nine months.

The first 10 million cases were reached on June 27 and the first 20 million on August 9. Cases are expected to exceed 30 million in the second half of this month, after which the number of new cases is set to increase its pace, according to the global projections made by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), based in Seattle, Washington.

According to Worldometer Dashboard, on September 6, 2020:

* Globally: total cases 27,234,299; total deaths 886,192
* Europe: total cases 3,797,637; total deaths 209,970
* North America (including Mexico and Central America): total cases 7,658,021; total deaths 280,295
* South America: total cases 6,688,579; total deaths 211,692
* Asia: total cases 7,755,652; total deaths 152,104, with India at the epicenter
* Africa: total cases 1,304,400; total deaths 31,332
* Oceania: total cases 29,289; total deaths 784

Based on IHME's current global projections, by December 1, 2020, the cumulative number of deaths will exceed 1.92 million, an additional million victims over the next three months. By various regions, the figures are as follows:

* East Asia and Pacific: 131,736 deaths, with a peak of 4,820 deaths per day
* South Asia: 404,016 deaths, with daily deaths at 9,716
* Europe and Central Asia: 406,204 deaths, with 5,441 deaths per day peaking in the last week of December at 9,670 daily deaths
* Latin Americas and Caribbean islands: 478,124 deaths, with a peak of 1,600 daily deaths
* North America (the US and Canada): 339,647 deaths, with a peak of 3,137 daily deaths
* North Africa and the Middle East: 113,839 deaths, with an initial peak of 1,671 followed by a second surge mid-December
* Sub-Saharan Africa: 50,033 deaths, with a peak of 809 deaths per day

Daily deaths are projected to start climbing after October 1 and then rise sharply after November 1. By December 1, current projections for the daily number of deaths stand at 26,870. Hospital resources expected in use in December include 1.87 million hospital beds, 399,463 intensive care unit (ICU) beds and 340,307 ventilators. These projections are driven by dropping temperatures in the fall and winter season that drive people indoors, compounded by declining mask usage, which stands at around 60 percent, and declining social distancing measures.

India has become the epicenter of the pandemic as daily COVID-19 infection rates continue their ascent unabated. On September 6, the country recorded a single-day high of 91,723 new cases. With over 4.28 million cases, it is second only to the United States, with 6.48 million cases. Though India ranks third in number of deaths, this is most certainly a gross underestimation. Testing rates remain abysmally low, and most of the population that live in rural areas lack access to medical attention, making a diagnosis attributable to COVID-19 nearly impossible. On the other hand, more than half the population is under the age of 25, which is known to be a factor for improved outcomes.

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With 634,000 cases and over 67,000 deaths, Mexico's crude case fatality rate has been one of the highest, at above 10 percent. It is fourth in terms of deaths behind the United States, Brazil and India. Recent government statistics place the number of excess deaths from March to August from all causes at 122,765 more than previous years, indicating a gross underestimation of COVID-19 deaths. Excess mortality has been predominately among people between 45 to 65 years of age. Late last week, Hugo Lopez Gatell, a health official for the Mexican state, informed the press that they had run out of death certificates.

On Friday, France saw a spike in new cases reach close to 9,000, the largest daily increase since the beginning of the pandemic. As Bloomberg noted, the surge is arriving just as schools are preparing for the arrival of 12 million students. Yet, Macron's government is pushing back against any future lockdown measures. Health Minister Olivier Veran, speaking on France's BFM TV, a 24-hour rolling news and weather channel, said, "I can't imagine a total re-confinement and the president doesn't want to consider a general re-confinement."

Across Europe, cases have been on the rise as lockdowns were eased and summer travels were permitted. Repeatedly, leaders of every country have cited the crippling economy and public fatigue as justification for not reviving future lockdowns or containment measures. UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson has even called the reopening of schools a "moral duty," a necessary strategy for recovery from the pandemic. Behind these sentiments lies the policy of herd immunity working through political figures to force the population to accept as inevitable that which is preventable.

In an opinion piece in the *New York Times* Dr. Devi Sridhar, chair of global public health at the University of Edinburgh, said of the growing number of cases throughout Europe, "Lockdown measures can bring case numbers low enough that testing and tracing can break chains of transmission. European countries have already taken a severe economic and social hit to contain COVID-19, but to finish the job and truly crunch the curve, they need to build up a massive diagnostic capacity to be able to run large, fast and accurate testing services. This is a difficult project but not impossible."

NPR recently sat down with the head of IHME's team, Chris Murray, as well as Dr. Ashish Jha of Brown University and Kalipso Chalkidou of the Imperial College School of Public Health in London to discuss these horrific but possibly controversial figures.

Murray said that according to his team's calculations, "When you look at the huge epidemics that unfolded in Argentina, despite considerable efforts at lockdowns, the big epidemics that occurred in Chile, the epidemics in Southern Brazil and South Africa and contrasted them with what was happening in the Northern Hemisphere, in places with similar social distancing mandates, where things were actually on average, improving—that's where in the statistical analysis, we see a very strong correlation with seasonality."

Dr. Jha said that the projections of 410,000 deaths in the US by January 1 are highly implausible. He explained, "We have gotten so much better at taking care of sick patients, I think mortality has probably fallen by about 50 percent." Yet, Murray countered that his team found that death rates have failed to improve even after advancements in treatments and various therapies. Dr. Chalkidou added that many countries across the globe lack reliable health statistics, making determination of the cause of death impossible. "This means it's likely that vast numbers of COVID-19 deaths are going uncounted. We also don't have good data on comorbidities that increase people's chances of dying of COVID-19."

These chilling conversations and reports deserve thoughtfully consideration. They provide a disastrous prognosis that the near-future trajectory of the pandemic will have devastating consequences if immediate measures are not taken to stem the transmission of this contagion. Yet, massive political efforts are being employed to open schools and force society to return to pre-pandemic existence for the sake of the financial markets. That these startling figures do not assume the primary focus in current world events is criminally negligent and the hallmark of the criminality of the ruling elites.

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