

Las Vegas health reports detail spread of COVID-19 in casinos

Adam Mclean
24 September 2020

An August report by health officials from the Southern Nevada Health District (NVHD) found that the vast majority of exposures to coronavirus in the Las Vegas area occurred in casinos and resort hotels. The data in this report also show which locations are the worst “spreaders” of the virus.

This report is the latest in an ever growing list of evidence showing that the reopening of businesses after the lockdowns in March and April contributed the spread of the virus and endangered lives.

Instead of counting the number of infections, the report counts the number of “exposure events,” the occasions in which a known carrier spread the disease. The worst locations were generally the biggest casinos, with the most exposures happening at the Cosmopolitan, the Bellagio, MGM Grand, the Venetian, and Caesars Palace. These five account for over 750 exposures since the beginning of the year, translating into many more infections.

In a rare move, the luxurious Wynn hotel released its internal figures last Thursday. According to their own testing, which was done at the initiative of the company and which does not include their entire workforce, 548 workers out of 15,000 tested positive for the virus. While the hotel is spinning the figures as showing only a slim minority of its workforce contracted the disease, this is higher than the overall infection rate in Clark County (which has 64,895 confirmed cases out of a total population of nearly 2.3 million). Moreover, it is likely an underestimate. The same report counted only six guests since June who had the disease. The NVHD report counted 65 exposure events at the Wynn since the beginning of the year, with several dozen happening in the last month alone.

A number of smaller hotels constitute a “long tail” in the distribution of the data, and in total account for

more exposures than any single hotel. Apart from entertainment, the worst sites were the Clark County Detention Center, Allegiant Stadium—which was completed over the summer and has yet to host any publicly-attended events—and multiple Amazon fulfillment centers in north Las Vegas.

Daily infections throughout Las Vegas skyrocketed after casinos reopened in June, jumping from about 100 per day to over a thousand for much of July. It has since lowered again, but is still several times higher than its low during the spring.

The Culinary Workers Union, the largest and most influential union in the state, has done virtually nothing to ensure the safety of its workers. Last month, the union hailed the passing of the “Adolfo Fernandez Bill,” named after a utility porter who died from COVID-19, as a major victory. In reality the legislation combines tepid reforms with legal immunity for businesses if their employees contract the disease at work. The bill was promoted by the casinos themselves.

The bill only mandates basic measures which the majority of the population has already adopted on their own, including hand washing, social distancing, regular cleaning and testing. It only guarantees 10 days of paid time off for those who contract the virus, and enforcement is handled by infrequent inspections carried out by nominally “independent” regulators.

Since the passing of the bill, the union’s press has been focused on the election, with nothing printed in the last month relating to the virus except material denouncing the Trump administration’s record and promoting the Biden campaign—which promotes the same murderous program of herd immunity as the Trump administration. In the meantime, more workers are contracting the virus and dealing with all its

consequent medical and economic miseries.

The Socialist Equality Party has called for the shutting down of all non-essential businesses until such time as the disease is brought under control, and for full pay and benefits for all workers, to be paid for by the billionaires who have reaped ever-growing profits through the course of the pandemic.

Nevada is home to seven billionaires with a combined wealth of around \$50 billion. The reallocation of their vast wealth could more than provide for the basic necessities of the Nevada working class until the pandemic is brought under control.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact