

Michigan State University pushes forward with football amid a mass spike in COVID-19 cases

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Since August 24, there have been 1,250 cases of COVID-19 linked to the reopening of Michigan State University (MSU). The university has officially recorded 499 positive cases, which both the university and the Ingham County Health Department have acknowledged is an underestimation of the true number of cases.

The sheer speed at which the virus is spreading is expressed by the fact that only 41 cases were known before the first of September.

Just over a week ago, the Ingham County Health Department recommended the entire MSU campus self-quarantine after nearly 350 new cases emerged on campus. The health department followed this suggestion by imposing a mandatory quarantine for 23 fraternity and sorority houses, and seven rental houses. Even with these measures, cases have exploded, reinforcing the basic fact that college and university campuses, where thousands of students live in dorms and other forms of student housing, cannot reopen safely.

The outbreak at MSU is only the latest indictment of the ruling class's homicidal back-to-work and back-to-school campaigns, spearheaded by the Trump administration and supported by the Democrats.

Despite this massive outbreak, testing numbers are declining on the campus. In a statement given to the press last Tuesday, Linda Vail, a health officer of Ingham County, noted that MSU's case count only includes self-reported positive cases.

Vail also acknowledged the university's refusal to use the official health department case data even though MSU relies on the county health department to carry out part of its contact tracing. In spite of this, Vail has

called MSU "amazing partners" in fighting COVID-19. In the latest demonstration of her kowtowing to the MSU administration, Vail made clear she would not directly order MSU to cancel its first football game and would only "advise" them to do so.

This dangerous complicity from local health officials is being promoted at the highest levels. Just in the past few weeks alone, the CDC modified its health guidelines to facilitate the reopening workplaces, schools, and college university campuses, under immense pressure from Washington.

MSU has decided to push ahead with its scheduled October 24 football game. MSU spokesperson Emily Guerrant defended this position by stating that Vail doesn't have the authority to order MSU to cancel its game: "In a pandemic, a local health official has a lot of power, but I honestly don't know when it comes to a football gathering." This statement is in direct contradiction with the Michigan health code which gives authority to health officers to make such decisions during epidemics or pandemics.

The drive to continue college sports is no doubt motivated by the fact that they are a primary source of revenue for universities. According to *Forbes*, MSU made an average of \$44 million in profit from its football program each year between 2015-17, making it the 22nd most profitable program in the state. MSU's team also happens to be the sixth most valued team in the Big Ten.

The university also announced last week that they would be furloughing the entirety of its student Residential and Hospitality Services (RHS) staff with a less than two-week notice. These 700+ student employees worked overtime to set up the campus and

assisted with student move-ins in the early weeks of the semester.

This cutthroat decision also places the student workers in a particularly precarious situation. These students have no way to pull out of their housing contracts. With many now losing their income they will have to decide within one week whether or not to drop their classes in order to meet the deadline to get a full tuition refund. This means MSU has left many international students and students reliant on their wages and work-study compensation to attend school in limbo with no date as to when they can expect to return to work.

Despite overwhelming scientific evidence that indicated that the reopening of schools would lead to hotspots for the virus, hundreds of universities still pushed forward with reopening plans. The cost of these decisions is now playing out in real time. Not only has it led to more cases, more hospitalizations, and more death, but also the destabilization of the lives and livelihoods of students and workers.

However, students, teachers, and workers have not taken these decisions laying down. Opposition continues to build at universities and K-12 schools throughout the country.

At the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC), thousands of UIC workers, along with 800 nurses from the University of Illinois Hospital, have been on strike for higher wages, better staffing, improvements on workload and time off, and personal protective equipment (PPE) like N95 masks for all health care workers and hospital staff.

At the same time, pressure continues to mount at the University of Iowa and Iowa State University, where students and faculty are protesting the dangerous reopening policies of both schools.

The recent strike by graduate students at the University of Michigan against the university's dangerous reopening policies continued for over a week before being smothered by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), which isolated the strike and worked hand-in-hand with the university administration to end it.

This development, in particular, demonstrates the necessity of turning to the only social force capable of fighting for the health, safety, and right to life of students and workers. That social force is the working

class.

The Socialist Equality Party and its youth and student wing, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, urge students, teachers, and staff to link up their struggles to put an end to the sacrifice of human life for corporate profit. All those who support this initiative should **join our Facebook page** and **contact us today** to find out how to get involved.



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