

Nineteen-year-old North Carolina university student in “tremendous shape” dies from COVID-19

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On Monday, a 19-year-old college student at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina, died from neurological complications after contracting COVID-19. Chad Dorrill, described as being in “tremendous shape” by his uncle, contracted the virus after his return to Boone for fall classes.

After developing flu-like symptoms, Dorrill returned home, where he tested positive on September 7. After quarantining for 10 days, and being cleared by his doctor, he returned to school. Soon afterward, he began suffering serious neurological problems. “When he tried to get out of bed his legs were not working, and my brother had to carry him to the car and take him to the emergency room,” his uncle, David Dorrill, told the *New York Times*. “It was a COVID complication that rather than attacking his respiratory system attacked his brain.”

Dorrill was a long-distance runner and former high school basketball player. “He was healthy. ... Skinny. Could run six miles without any issue. He ran with us less than three weeks ago, in fact. He was healthy—until this hit,” his uncle explained.

According to Tonia Maxcy, a family friend, doctors suspect that COVID-19 triggered an undetected case of Guillain-Barré syndrome in Dorrill. Guillain-Barré causes the body’s immune system to attack nerve cells. It was also linked to the Zika virus outbreak in Brazil in 2015, where it caused paralysis in those affected by the syndrome. As of June 29, according to the journal *Neurological Sciences*, there have been approximately 31 reported cases of Guillain-Barré syndrome caused by COVID-19 worldwide.

Significantly, Dorrill was living off-campus, taking only online courses and, according to his uncle, “told

us he was always careful to wear a mask.” Yet, he still contracted the virus, leading to his completely avoidable death. His mother, Susan Dorrill, said that “if it can happen to a super healthy 19-year-old boy who doesn’t smoke, vape or do drugs, it can happen to anyone.”

The university continues to operate both in-person and virtual classes, despite officially acknowledging 183 active cases among students and three among employees. An Appalachian State spokeswoman told the *New York Times* that the University has tested 7,569 students this semester, with 334 positive cases, a positivity rate of 4.4 percent. Since March, the school has reported 594 positive cases among students, 29 for employees and 41 for subcontractors.

In the wake of Dorrill’s death, the school has not announced any changes to how it operates or any additional safety measures. Instead, the university’s chancellor, Sheri Everts, continues to put the onus on students’ “personal responsibility.”

In a public statement issued Tuesday, Everts wrote, “All of us must remain vigilant with our safety behaviors wherever we are in our community. We can flatten the curve, but to do so, we must persevere. From the smallest acts to the most important personal relationships, we must actively work each day to reduce the spread of this highly communicable disease.” Despite acknowledging “a rise in COVID-19 cases in students,” Everts continues to allow in-person classes, with gatherings of up to 25 people permitted indoors and 50 outdoors.

Since the campus reopened, confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Watauga County, where Appalachian State is located, have more than doubled to more than

900. Last week, the county experienced its worst seven-day period. As with college communities across the US, by bringing students back, Appalachian State officials knowingly risked not only the lives of students and employees but of the broader community.

Nationwide, there have been more than 130,000 diagnosed cases of COVID-19 on college campuses, with cases confirmed at more than 1,300 schools. These outbreaks have led to the deaths of at least 70 people, including students and employees of the colleges.

Outbreaks of COVID-19 are occurring at schools and colleges internationally, including outbreaks at 45 universities in the United Kingdom. In Spain, more than 200 schools recorded coronavirus-related incidents after the first week of classes. There have been outbreaks in schools in Germany and France as well. In Greece, high school students have occupied 700 schools, more than a fifth of the country's total, in protest against numerous outbreaks and inadequate protections in schools.

As in the United States, capitalist politicians all over the world have adopted a de facto policy of herd immunity for the working class, letting the virus spread virtually uncontrolled throughout poorer sections of the population in order to facilitate the complete opening of the economy. A central part of reopening businesses and factories is forcing the reopening of schools, regardless of the number of deaths.

Despite widespread opposition among teachers, parents and students, the pro-capitalist teachers' unions have facilitated the reopening of schools and helped to smother opposition where strikes have broken out, such as the recent nine-day strike of University of Michigan graduate students.

In the United States, educators have begun to fight back against the reckless school reopenings by forming independent rank-and-file safety committees. In August, the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee was formed as a national network to unify the struggles of teachers, school employees, parents and students, and to prepare for a nationwide general strike to halt the unsafe opening of schools. Since its launch, committees have been established in Duval County, Florida; Detroit; New York City; Los Angeles; and Texas, with more in the process of formation.

The Socialist Equality Party and its student and youth movement, the International Youth and Students for

Social Equality, urge students, teachers, college faculty, parents and others to join this committee and take up the fight to stop the reckless drive to reopen schools and colleges.



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