

COVID-19 rampaging across the US Midwest

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The coronavirus outbreak in Wisconsin is currently one of the worst in the United States, with more than 2,500 new cases being reported each day in the last week. More than 17,000 people in Wisconsin tested positive in the last week. On Friday, the state reported the third highest daily total in the country with 2,745 new cases. Five deaths were recorded with more than 25,000 active cases.

With the rise in infections, hospitals in northern Wisconsin are being inundated by coronavirus cases.

Matthew Heywood, president and CEO of Aspirus HealthCare in Wausau, a city of 40,000 in central Wisconsin, told the Associated Press (AP), “The problem is, how do we care for you when you have an accident when we have an overflow of COVID patients? There’s only so much you can do before you start to overwhelm the system.”

Heywood also said Aspirus is placing patients on waiting lists and has seen a 30 percent increase of COVID-19 patients over the course of the last five days.

“If it’s growing the way that it has for the past week or so, we’re going to be in a dire situation in two, three, four weeks,” Michael Hooker, vice president and chief medical officer for acute care at ThedaCare, a hospital chain in the Fox Valley, explained to the AP. “Yes, we saw this coming but didn’t expect it to be quite so rapid.”

While the reopening of schools and universities drove the spread of the disease among young people earlier in September, officials are reporting that infections are now growing among other age groups as well. Dane County, the location of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, reports 45 percent of COVID-19 cases are found among 18- to 22-year-olds. However, the county has seen a 28 percent rise in cases among other age groups in recent weeks.

Green Bay public schools shut buildings to all teachers and staff who had been using the buildings to teach virtually. The area’s private Catholic schools will be closed to students beginning next week and online instruction begins Tuesday.

The *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* reported the number of patients hospitalized with COVID-19 and those in intensive care units more than doubled over the last month. On Thursday, 669 coronavirus patients were hospitalized, and

208 were in an intensive care unit. On September 1, 295 were hospitalized and 100 in intensive care.

Amid the rapid spread of the virus in the state and dire warnings from health officials, Republican leaders appeared in court this week to support a lawsuit from the right-wing Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty against Democratic Governor Tony Evers’ statewide mask mandate. The state’s Republican-dominated Supreme Court struck down statewide social distancing restrictions in May.

The explosion of the pandemic in the state is beginning to impact the entire Midwest region. Near the border with Wisconsin, in northern Illinois, 26 of 42 Rockford public schools are reporting cases, along with all the area colleges.

Significant numbers of workers commute from state to state in the region for work, driving from Wisconsin into Illinois or from Illinois into Missouri to work in the large manufacturing plants in the region, including FCA Belvidere, not far from Beloit, and GM Wentzville. As the regional infection rates climb, factories with thousands of workers in close proximity represent a major risk for spreading the pandemic. Amazon has announced that more than 19,000 of its workers in the US have been infected with COVID-19.

In Missouri on Friday, officials reported 1,942 new cases and 29 deaths, bringing the state’s total to 133,439 confirmed cases and 2,268 deaths. The rising number of infections is currently being driven by rural counties, according to the state health department. New Madrid County, which has a population of about 17,000, reported a positivity rate of 49.5 percent on Friday. Pemiscot County reported a positivity rate of 41 percent. Both areas are located in the southeastern-most portion of the state bordering Arkansas, Kentucky, Illinois and Tennessee.

The City of St. Louis Department of Health has called for those who attended the BikeFest in September, an annual motorcycle event outside the Lake of the Ozarks that draws over 100,000 people to the region, to get tested for COVID-19.

Cases have been steadily rising in St. Charles County, covering the northwestern outer suburbs of St. Louis, with 8,142 positive cases and 129 deaths as of October 1 in a

county of 402,000. Last week, businesses in the Main Street district of the city of St. Charles ended live music at 11:00 p.m. and imposed capacity limits after wide condemnation over images of packed crowds spread across social media.

Jefferson County south of St. Louis remains in the “red zone,” reporting 64 new cases on Friday. The Jefferson County Health Department has called for more restrictions to be placed on the county which has met resistance from local political leaders and some members of the public. Jefferson County Health Director Kelley Vollmar has said that COVID-19 hospitalizations have gone up 90 percent in the last 30 days.

Students have begun to return to in-person instruction in public schools in St. Louis County for at least two days a week. Rockwood School District had children through second grade return September 30. Mehlville School District plans to return third through eighth grade students on a hybrid model by October 8. Affton School District will follow the same plan beginning October 13. Lindbergh School District will have children returning starting October 5.

Unbelievably, the Lindbergh school district admits on its website that though there are cleaning and social distancing plans in place: “It is important to understand that these precautions will not necessarily eliminate COVID-19 from our learning environments.” Worry from parents has forced the school districts to allow parents the option to continue having their students study all-online.

About 40 percent of parents in the Affton School District are choosing to have their children remain at home. St. Louis County Executive Dan Page announced on September 23 that there will be a rollback of restrictions on youth sports. Before this announcement, St. Louis County-based Incarnate Word Academy held its girls softball games in neighboring St. Charles County.

Republican Governor Mike Parson and First Lady Teresa Parson have both reportedly tested positive for the virus, and after just one week of quarantine the governor announced he would be returning to his usual schedule. The personal infection of the Missouri ruling elite will not stop them from doing all in their power to have the economy functioning normally at the expense of thousands of workers lives.

As with the entire nation, the pandemic is deeply affecting Missouri’s economy. Restaurant chain P.F. Chang’s announced it will lay off 150 workers throughout the state, and 208 workers are to be laid off from the Chase Park Plaza Hotel in the Central West End district of St. Louis City. Three of the state-run Missouri visitor’s centers will close. Missouri Amtrak employees will be part of the 2,000 total employees nationwide that will be furloughed from the passenger rail company due to low ridership. Maritz, a

marketing firm based in Fenton, will lay off a total of 475 employees and temporarily furlough an additional 49.

It is estimated that 40 percent of US adults are suffering from mental distress due to the effects of the pandemic. Children are not being given the resources by schools to cope with the increased stress of isolation from friends and worry over getting themselves, their parents and siblings sick. Many school districts have only one licensed counselor per grade, making it impossible for counselors to address the mental health needs of vulnerable students.

The inability to make ends meet coupled with continued police brutality has also led to a surge in protests in the state. On the evening of September 24, protesters shut down a section of Interstate 64 in the St. Louis area. They continued to march on the interstate before dispersing at 8:00 p.m. Multiple protests were held throughout the St. Louis and Kansas City metro areas after the announcement that the police who shot and killed Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky would not be charged for her death. Governor Parson signed an executive order in the wake of the announcement activating the state National Guard as a precaution to quell unrest.

Students at University of Missouri-Columbia have protested over inadequate coronavirus safety measures. Signs had slogans including, “We won’t die for your dollars” and “[Chancellor Mun] Choi = liar.” As of Friday, the university had 76 reported active student cases. The University of Missouri has never done mass testing of students. In total there have been 1,546 student cases since August 19. Among the students’ demands is that all students receive free and rapid COVID-19 testing.

Appeals to the representatives of the two big business parties to impose life-saving restrictions will fall on deaf ears. Workers in the Midwest and across the country must take the initiative and form rank-and-file committees in their workplaces, schools and neighborhoods. This network of rank-and-file committees will lead the upcoming struggles of the working class against the deadly back-to-work and back-to-school plans of the ruling class. All who are interested in forming these committees should contact the WSWWS for assistance.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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