

SUNY Cortland pauses in-person instruction after outbreak of COVID-19

Alex Findijs
8 October 2020

The State University of New York (SUNY) at Cortland has become the third SUNY school to pause in-person instruction due to outbreaks of COVID-19. The Cortland outbreak follows the shutdown of the SUNY Oneonta campus on September 3 and a two-week halt to in-person classes at SUNY Oswego, announced on September 18.

Since September 26, 101 students have tested positive at Cortland. The school has seen a total of 235 cumulative cases out of 6,800 students since the start of the semester. Cortland will reportedly halt in-person instruction for two weeks.

While SUNY administrators were quick to blame student gatherings for the outbreaks at Oneonta and Oswego, Cortland officials have been unable to pinpoint a source of the outbreak. On Monday, SUNY Chancellor Jim Malatras admitted that “there’s no clear issue arising from off-campus activity.”

The fact that Cortland students were not gathering in unsafe conditions and were not violating guidelines—as SUNY has accused students of doing at other campuses—is confirmation of the analysis by the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) that there is no safe way to reopen schools for face-to-face instruction.

To date, more than 2,282 SUNY students statewide have contracted the virus. The consequences of this growing number of cases could be dire. The long-term health complications of even mild cases of COVID-19 are still unclear, but the CDC has reported cases of myocarditis, the inflammation and damage of the heart muscle, in young people. The most severe effects are still more common in older patients with existing health problems, but research from the Mayo Clinic has recorded “lasting damage to the heart muscle, even in people who experienced only mild COVID-19 symptoms.”

Regarding COVID-19’s effects on the brain, the Mayo Clinic has also noted that young people can also suffer from “strokes, seizures and Guillain-Barré syndrome—a condition that causes temporary paralysis.” In fact, it is suspected that a 19-year-old Appalachian State University student, Chad Dorrill, died last week as a result of COVID-19 triggering an undetected case of Guillain-Barré syndrome. COVID-19 may also increase the risk of a person developing Parkinson’s disease and Alzheimer’s.

The risk is not just to SUNY students. Following the outbreak in Oneonta, 228 people became infected in Otsego county, where the school is located. Similarly, in Oswego county, 241 people contracted the virus after SUNY Oswego reopened for the semester. This threat of transmission to and from campuses and the surrounding communities could affect almost everyone in New York, as 95 percent of all New Yorkers live within 30 miles of a SUNY school.

The responsibility for these infections lies with the Democratic Party-run state government and the SUNY Board of Trustees, which has deep ties to the Democrats. The opening of college campuses is also being used as the justification for opening K-12 schools, which is part of the drive to fully reopen the economy by Governor Andrew Cuomo and his Democratic colleagues and Republican counterparts across the country.

Desperate to avoid all responsibility and blame, the SUNY system has taken to attacking students as “irresponsible” and blaming all cases on them. SUNY Cortland President Erik Bitterbaum has already stated that several students have been punished for violating guidelines, but did not provide details.

Bitterbaum warned that students accused of violating guidelines will “face immediate academic and housing

suspension and possible dismissal, loss of athletic eligibility, and ineligibility for admission at every other SUNY college.” This is in line with SUNY’s new standardized punishments, which range from full-year suspension to expulsion and even criminal prosecution.

Additionally, SUNY Chancellor Malatras appointed the Commissioner of SUNY University Police, Frank Lawrence, to work with Cortland University police on safety protocol enforcement. The mobilization of police units and collaboration of universities with local police forces is a concerning development. In Oswego, SUNY and local police coordinated to conduct patrols and door-to-door inspections of student neighborhoods and homes. Cortland may be seeking to implement similar repressive measures that will ultimately be aimed at suppressing protests and strikes in the area.

The outbreak at Cortland is another consequence of the drive to reopen schools and the economy. More students and community members will become sick throughout the country as the semester continues into winter. The WSWS urges students and workers who want to fight against the reckless reopening of schools and victimization of students and workers to join the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact