

Highest one-week increase in US child cases since onset of COVID-19 pandemic

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Last week, 61,000 children in the US were diagnosed with COVID-19. This figure is higher than in any other week since the onset of the pandemic, according to data reported Monday by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the Children's Hospital Association.

In total, 853,635 children have been diagnosed with the virus this year, representing 11.1 percent of all US cases. The percentage of pediatric cases has risen dramatically since mid-April, when children accounted for just 2 percent of COVID-19 cases in the country.

Even more concerning, the AAP said it believes the true number of children with COVID-19 is even higher than the reports indicate because the illness tends to be mild in children, making them less likely to be tested.

In a statement released in tandem with the new report, AAP President Sally Goza, an MD, sounded the alarm: "This is a stark reminder of the impact this pandemic is having on everyone, including our children and adolescents. This virus is highly contagious, and as we see spikes in many communities, children are more likely to be infected, too."

Dr. Goza continued: "On every measure—new infections, hospitalizations and deaths—the US is headed in the wrong direction. We urge policymakers to listen to doctors and public health experts rather than level baseless accusations against them. Physicians, nurses and other health care professionals have put their lives on the line to protect our communities."

The AAP report found that the biggest increases in pediatric COVID-19 case numbers in October occurred in western states: Alaska, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico and Utah. These states saw increases of 25 percent or more. The Dakotas, Kentucky, Michigan and Wisconsin also reported higher rises among children.

Dr. Greg Demuri, a pediatric infectious disease specialist at UW (University of Wisconsin) Health in Madison, Wisconsin, told NBC News that the situation in Wisconsin was extremely serious. "It just keeps going from horrible to even worse," he said. "There doesn't seem to be any end in sight."

Demuri said UW Health is now seeing new pediatric COVID-19 hospitalizations on a daily basis. According to data compiled by NBC News, the total number of cases in the state has risen 88 percent in the past two weeks alone.

There is no doubt that the dramatic spike in cases among children is directly linked to the reckless reopening of K-12 schools for in-person learning. Before the school year began, numerous scientific studies warned that reopening the schools would lead to a significant spike in infections, hospitalizations and deaths.

As of Tuesday, Election Day, 60 percent of K-12 public school students were attending schools that offer in-person learning, a dramatic rise from 38 percent after Labor Day, two months ago, according to an ongoing audit conducted by Burbio.com.

The report states that 35.7 percent of students are presently in schools that offer some face-to-face learning on a daily basis; 26.5 percent have the option of hybrid schedules with two to three in-person days each week; and 37.8 percent attend schools that provide only virtual learning.

The spike in cases among youth should be taken as a sharp warning. The early figures that showed low numbers of infections among youth were used by Democrats and Republicans alike to justify their drive to reopen the schools while the pandemic remained uncontrolled.

This bipartisan campaign has been a central element

of a broader policy of “herd immunity”—i.e., allowing the virus to spread without restraint. This policy, opposed by all reputable scientists and medical professionals, has been spearheaded by the Trump administration. However, it has had the full support of the Democratic Party, which has done everything in its power to reopen the schools in districts around the country.

The devastating consequences are now playing out on a daily basis. Not only are children falling ill themselves, they are spreading the disease at home and among friends, infecting many others who may be more vulnerable. Hundreds of educators have fallen ill with the virus since the start of the school year, and many have lost their lives.

The toll on children is also growing. Just this weekend, a healthy 13-year-old eighth grader, Peyton Baumgarth from Missouri, died of COVID-19 just two weeks after catching the virus. He had no preexisting conditions.

Since the start of the fall semester, dozens of previously healthy young people have succumbed to the virus, including 19-year-old Chad Dorrill from North Carolina, 17-year-old Elvia “Rose” Ramirez from North Dakota, 20-year-old Jamain Stevens Jr. of Pennsylvania, 17-year-old Michael Lang, a freshman at the University of Dayton in Ohio, and Jezreel Lowie B. Juan of Hawaii, to name only a few.

New reports emerging almost weekly indicate that there are still many unknowns when it comes to the impact of the virus on children. One recent *JAMA Cardiology* study suggested that the effects of COVID-19 on the heart can possibly last a lifetime, even in younger and healthier individuals.

Because there were so few cases initially, experts struggled early on to identify long-term symptoms. The recent AAP statement notes an urgent need to collect more data on longer-term impacts on children, including ways the virus may harm the long-term physical health of infected children, as well as its emotional and mental health effects.

Dr. Andrew Pavia with Primary Children’s Hospital explained to *Deseret News* that “the problem with the view that by and large [children] are not impacted, so there is no reason to take precautions, is like saying there is no reason to wear a seat belt because most of the time you’re driving your car, you don’t have a

crash.”

He continued, “Children have much lower rates of serious complications, but that doesn’t help the child that does.”

The unprecedented catastrophe of the pandemic is fundamentally a social and political, not simply a medical, question. There is no reason that in the year 2020, with the immense resources, science and technology available to mankind, that children, teachers and parents should be risking their lives attending unsafe schools amid a raging global pandemic.

The motivations for this homicidal policy, carried out by Democratic and Republican politicians at every level, are determined by the need to protect the profits of the financial oligarchy.

Educators, along with workers, students and their families and loved ones, are being sacrificed in the interests of Wall Street. For this bloodbath to be stopped, the working class must intervene with its own organizations of struggle and its own program.

This fight is underway. Teachers and other school workers have taken the critical step of forming a network of nationally coordinated Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees to organize the immense opposition that exists to deadly school reopenings. These committees base their demands not on what the corporations and the politicians claim is affordable, but what is necessary to protect the lives and well-being of children, educators and the entire working class.

*We urge all workers and youth who want to fight against the unsafe reopening of schools to **contact us** today to learn more about these committees or to speak about your own conditions.*



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