As Mexico records 1 million coronavirus cases, 53 percent of tests are coming out positive

Andrea Lobo
17 November 2020

Mexico reached 1 million recorded coronavirus cases on Saturday and is expected to top 100,000 deaths sometime this week, the fourth highest death toll in the world after the United States, Brazil and India.

The seven-day moving average of daily new cases has risen 30 percent since September 23 and is approaching the level of around 7,000, reached during the height of the first wave in July. About three weeks after infections rebounded, daily deaths began to surge as well. The seven-day moving average for daily deaths has risen from 295 to 502 since October 13.

What is most striking is that more than half of the COVID-19 tests are coming out positive. According to the latest records available to World in Data up to November 9, Mexico has the highest COVID-19 positivity rate in the world, 53.4 percent. This is slightly higher than its previous peak in July.

This striking figure has been reached after a low of 18 percent on October 20. By comparison, in the United States, the seven-day moving average of daily cases has almost quadrupled since September 23, while the positivity rate has increased from about 4.3 percent to 12.3 percent.

The unavoidable conclusions are that the virus is spreading out of control and that the official data offers a very incomplete picture of the current increase in cases and even deaths. Through September 26, the Mexican government reported 193,170 "excess" deaths, while officially recognizing just 78,000 of them as caused by COVID-19.

Mexico's chief COVID-19 coordinator, Hugo López-Gatell, has acknowledged that the coronavirus death toll will not be known for at least two years, and that the task will be left to statisticians.

The government has responded by seeking to minimize the danger of the increase in cases and present it as an inevitable phenomenon.

On Monday, Mexican Director-General of Health Promotion Ricardo Cortés Alcalá brought up the positivity rate during the entire pandemic, which is 42 percent, and mentioned that 311,000 suspected cases they have documented were never tested, only to argue clumsily that the government is not "covering up" the extent of the pandemic.

Despite this, he and the Mexican corporate media have highlighted the claim that "only" 47,099 recorded cases are active.

On the question of why so many suspected patients were logged but never tested, Cortés said "some were never tested or their tests never arrived at the laboratory or were poorly taken or spilled en route" while "some were not taken because it didn't correspond or didn't have a chance of giving a result."

Meanwhile, workers who have gotten infected in the factories have reported to the WSWS and other news media that the public hospitals have simply refused to test them despite clear symptoms, instead sending them back to work.

Cortés then insinuated that daily deaths have fallen since they remain well below their highest point in July. He also acknowledged hospital occupancy is increasing nationally and has reached 33 percent, but said this increase was not affecting beds with ventilators. Not until a journalist asked him specifically did he refer to hospital occupancy in the state of Chihuahua, indicating that it is "really high" at about 75 percent, but that "surely" some hospitals there have an occupancy as low as 50 percent.

© World Socialist Web Site

A few days earlier, Chihuahua governor Javier Corral had declared that there are “no beds available” in the state and that the real occupancy rate is above 90 percent.

In fact, the states of Durango, Chihuahua, Coahuila and Nuevo León—all in the central region next to the US border that has the highest concentration of manufacturing plants— have occupancy rates of over 65 percent.

Meanwhile, in Mexico City, the epicenter of the pandemic, the authorities said last Thursday that new daily hospitalizations had increased from 20 to 100 in five days, but still refused to raise the risk level, instead implementing the barest minimum of precautions, requiring bars, movie theaters and casinos to close at 7 p.m. instead of 10 p.m.

On Monday, López-Gatell said the 1 million case milestone was “somewhat insignificant” since what matters is the vast understatement that “the epidemic remains active.” He added that cases “are increasing concurrently with the flu season, just as we’ve been predicting since March.” Yet, nothing was done to prevent it.

In response to the patently dishonest and indifferent COVID-19 policies of the ruling class, workers need to take matters into their own hands. In April, following a wave of wildcat strikes forcing shutdowns in Europe, the United States and Canada, thousands of workers at maquiladora sweatshops across the cities on the US-Mexico border struck, and forced most nonessential production to stop.

Bowing to pressure from Wall Street and the White House, the government of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador ordered nonessential production to begin reopening at the end of May, a murderous policy applied with the help of the trade unions.

In late October, the Chihuahua authorities were the first in the country to return to a “red” alert level, which officially means manufacturing plants have to work at 60 percent capacity. Having already experienced that corporations refuse to abide by such restrictions, workers in Chihuahua, the second main auto-parts producer in the country, have again taken independent action.

The same day the change was announced, on October 23, workers walked out at three maquiladoras to demand that the measures be enforced, citing numerous infections and deaths of co-workers. The plants included refrigerator-maker Electrolux and two auto-parts plants owned by APTIV—one in Ciudad Juárez and the other in Hidalgo del Parral. Workers at other maquiladoras in the state took to social media, threatening to join the strike.

The strikes had an immediate effect. Employer groups have since lobbied the health authorities unsuccessfully to raise the 60 percent limit. The right-wing government in Chihuahua was compelled to impose a mask-wearing mandate to attempt to reduce hospital occupancy rates and bring down the risk level.

In the United States, General Motors announced that its Bowling Green Assembly Plant in Kentucky was forced to close down November 12-13 because of a shortage of parts arriving from Mexico due to “COVID-19 restrictions.” The only explanation for this is the strikes, enforcing a cut in production in Chihuahua.

The brave initiative of workers in Chihuahua points the way forward for workers everywhere to use their immense economic power and take control of the response to the pandemic. The limited restrictions in Chihuahua, aimed at quelling opposition and maximizing the extraction of profits, are not enough. In order to control the pandemic and be able to even trace the virus, experts insist that nonessential production needs to shut down with full compensation for lost wages and income for the unemployed, while essential and frontline workers are given the necessary protective gear.

Workers in Mexico must form rank-and-file factory and workplace committees to fight for these necessary steps to prevent the unnecessary death of hundreds of thousands more. Being so closely connected through the production process, these committees must coordinate their struggle with their class brothers and sisters in the United States and internationally.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site