UK mother whose children all contracted COVID-19 speaks out to demand school closures: “I agree you must close schools and universities to save lives”

Our reporters
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WSWS reporters spoke to Linda, a parent of three children, aged 14, 15 and 16, who all tested positive for coronavirus at the end of October. Linda, 55, has a pre-existing cardiac problem, and her husband Mark, 63, has asthma, placing them in the high-risk group.

Linda and Mark live in Thanet in Kent, a county in south east England that is one of the major hotspots for COVID-19 infections in the UK. Figures released Monday revealed that Swale in Kent reported the highest COVID-19 rate in the country, overtaking the Yorkshire city of Hull. Swale recorded 631.7 cases per 100,000 people for the seven days to November 18, up from 425.8 cases per 100,000 over the previous seven days. Thanet, with a population of nearly 142,000 has seen its coronavirus case rate soar from 460.8 per 100,000 people to 515.1 in the seven days to November 18.

Linda said that although her children had recovered, it had been an “awful” experience after her son Troy, aged 15, became infected by COVID-19.

“The person Troy got the virus off is in such a bad way, he has been taken to London on a ventilator ever since.” She only found out Troy had been exposed from this child’s sister after he had been rushed to hospital.

“I immediately thought, we need to get Troy tested because he had been with him the other day when he didn’t feel well.”

Although not immediately displaying symptoms, Linda insisted her husband take him for a test. Two days later, this confirmed that Troy was positive for COVID-19.

Although her husband had tested negative, Linda thought it was possible her other two children might have contracted the virus. “So, we all started isolating and put together a plan of how we were going to handle this without catching it ourselves.

“We were sanitising everything, wearing masks all in separate rooms.” As her own test result was delayed, to be safe, she isolated herself from her husband.

Linda was critical of her family’s experience with the National Health Service (NHS) Track and Trace system.

“They waffle on about you’ve got to isolate but can’t decide how long you have to isolate for. One minute its 10 days then its 14 days.

After being told there was no need to take another test before going back to school or work, Linda said she wanted to be sure they were all clear, so got retested. The track and trace service came back to her and advised, after 10 days isolation, that the family could go back to school or work. As her test was negative, she could return to work after 14 days. “It doesn’t make sense either way. So, they are still positive, it’s still in them. No one knows for sure. In my eyes, if you test positive, you’ve got it and have a chance of passing it on. In my eyes you isolate until you prove negative.”

“We rang the head of A&E (Accident & Emergency), whom we know, and asked his advice. He said, ‘no way, keep them home and isolate until they have a negative test’”.

“We were going to do that anyway because we didn’t trust the advice [from track and trace], which is someone in a call centre.”

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During isolation, Linda decided she did not want the children to go back to school because the virus was "going through the schools like wildfire."

Her daughter's school said it was OK for her to stay away and study at home. However, her son's school insisted that government guidelines meant he had to come back after isolation.

Despite Linda's existing health condition putting her in a high-risk category, the school said she could face sanctions if she kept her son at home. "I said, that's not really fair because it's not like I'm taking them on holiday, I've got a valid reason."

As a result, she contacted her local MP, Sir Roger Gale (Conservative Party). After explaining the situation and hoping for "a bit of back up", he told her in words reflecting the governments homicidal herd immunity policy, "Send them back as they'll be immune."

Linda replied there was no proof that her children were now immune and could not catch the virus twice.

Gale responded by saying her son should attend school to complete his GCSE studies. Linda argued that schoolwork can be caught up with and is not more important than her family's health. "It can be a life-threatening situation and you're saying their exams are more important."

"That stupid MP Roger Gale said missing school can affect them for the rest of their lives. If they shut them for a year, they could stick an extra year on the end, what's a year in a kid's life?"

Linda told the WSWS she was angry when she finished speaking to Gale because, "If I had waited for them to display symptoms before getting them tested, they would have gone back to school spreading it around and giving it to us."

In the first lockdown, schools had been kept open just for key workers' children, such as National Health Service staff, so "it was more controllable because there were not that many in school," she recalled.

When pupils returned to school in September, "they said they would all be wearing masks, but no one wears masks." When I spoke to Troy's teacher, she said they had to wear masks now. "But they don't wear them in the classroom. Does COVID not go into the classroom?"

After the first lockdown, the pubs and other businesses had started opening again in July and then children were sent back to school, "all herded together."

"Two months down the line, the whole country's back to square one. Small businesses are going down the pan."

"I had a cardiac arrest about four years ago. The nurse in the hospital, who lived across the road from me, has since died of coronavirus."

"She was only 39 and picked it up on the ICU and has left three children. It's sad, I knew her, and she looked after me in hospital and suddenly she's just wiped out by it."

Linda found out about the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee when a friend forwarded her a link to register to attend a meeting. Linda told the WSWS "so I wrote in. I want to attend the next meeting on Saturday. I agree you must close schools and universities to save lives."

The Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee encourage all educators, parents and students to join the committee and register to attend its next online meeting on Saturday, November 28 at 2pm.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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