

A coronavirus Christmas

COVID-19 hospitalizations, deaths worldwide reach record highs

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All over the world, the 2020 holiday season is dominated by the tragic reality that 1.7 million human beings, cut down by the coronavirus pandemic, will never again have the opportunity to visit and celebrate with loved ones.

More than three people have died each minute from the disease since the first case of COVID-19 was reported to the World Health Organization. They include grandparents forced to say goodbye to their loved ones via computer, workers whose last moments were spent struggling to breathe on a ventilator, young adults whose lives had barely begun, and infants as young as two months old who were barely aware of the world before their lives were snuffed out.

Nearly a year on, the pandemic is accelerating. More than 11,500 people are dying every day, almost double the highest death rate recorded during the first wave in April. It took four months for the first 100,000 lives to be lost. Now, 100,000 people are killed every nine days.

The United States remains the most hard-hit country. President Donald Trump's policy of herd immunity, aided and abetted by the Democrats, has so far slain more than one in every 1,000 people living in the country. Every day nearly 3,000 deaths are reported, along with 220,000 new infections, as schools and workplaces are forced to remain open, further spreading the deadly disease.

The most recent surge has prompted a variety of ominous comments, particularly from President-elect Biden's coronavirus advisory board. Dr. Celine Gounder, a professor at New York University, told MSNBC that a "surge on top of a surge on top of a surge" is coming in the next few weeks. She warned that hospital workers will "have to be making some very difficult decisions about triaging, unfortunately, who gets what care and who does not."

This will be most true in states such as California, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Texas, where hospital systems are nearing capacity. "If we have another surge after Christmas and New Year's like we did after Thanksgiving, it will

completely break our hospitals," Tennessee Health Commissioner Dr. Lisa Piercey told National Public Radio.

Comments along these lines were made by another member of Biden's advisory board, Dr. Atul Gawande. He told CNBC that "hospitals in more than a third of the country are already full to overflowing," setting the stage for an even more catastrophic situation than that which already exists. There are more than 115,000 coronavirus-related hospitalizations in the US, double the peak numbers in both July and April, and the daily hospitalization rate is rising,

When asked about how to avoid an even worse scenario, Gawande responded, "What do we do about it? It is still the same practices that really work," before adding, "The next 100,000 deaths are baked in."

The statement that nothing can be done to save 100,000 lives amounts to an admission of the bankruptcy of the "practices" of the entire American ruling class. It is, moreover, untrue.

It is well known that specific emergency measures can be taken to contain and eventually halt the spread of the virus and end the wave of death. In those countries, such as China and Vietnam, that have carried out serious and sustained lockdowns, including nonessential workplaces and schools, the virus has been contained and almost eliminated.

China, where the virus first emerged, has a population of 1.4 billion, more than four times that of the United States. Its total COVID-19 death toll is 4,634, and no deaths from the virus have been recorded since April. The United States, which, like the industrialized countries of Europe, has insisted on keeping non-essential production going and forcing schools to stay open, is now suffering on average some 19,600 COVID fatalities a week—more than four times the total in China over the entire course of the year. It is not an endorsement of the Chinese regime to acknowledge these facts.

Emergency measures that would contain and control the virus and end the wave of deaths are not taken for one basic

reason: they cut across the economic interests of the financial oligarchies that dominate capitalist society. Corporate profits, stock prices and the wealth of the super-rich take absolute priority over human life. And to force workers into virus-infested plants and workplaces, and students and educators into unsafe schools, so as to keep the flow of corporate profits going, the same ruling classes refuse to provide income protection for the growing ranks of the unemployed. Workers are presented with the “choice” of risking death or becoming homeless and destitute.

As the derisory “relief” bill just passed by the US Congress underscores, the ruling class—most brazenly in the US—is using the pandemic to further enrich itself and drive down even more the wages and social conditions of the working class.

That is why the struggle against the pandemic, mass death and mass impoverishment is a political struggle against the capitalist system. It depends on the independent intervention of the working class to force the shutdown of non-essential production and the schools, provide full income protection for the workers affected, establish safe conditions in essential workplaces, hire thousands more nurses and doctors, provide ample medical and health resources, including PPE, and guarantee high-speed internet and other resources for home learning during the pandemic. The vast resources required for these social necessities can and must be acquired through the expropriation of the obscene wealth of the corporate-financial elite and the establishment of public ownership of the major corporations and banks, under the democratic control of the working class.

The incoming Biden administration has already rejected any such measures, declaring instead that there must be no shutdown and the schools must be fully reopened—in all essentials, the same homicidal herd immunity policy pursued by Trump. Those condemned to die should roll over and accept their fate, perhaps with a \$600 consolation prize.

Biden and Trump’s approach to the pandemic is mirrored by every major capitalist government. In Great Britain, where a new and more infectious strain of the coronavirus was recently detected, the National Health Service predicts that its hospitals will be treating more coronavirus patients on Christmas Day than at any point in the pandemic. The country has suffered more than 69,000 deaths and is currently facing a record number of new infections.

In Brazil, which has the second highest coronavirus death toll in the world, more than 189,000, fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro is promoting hydroxychloroquine as a cure for the pandemic. The drug, touted by Trump as well, has been proven to have no effect on COVID-19 mortality rates. This has not stopped Bolsonaro from stepping up his own herd immunity policy by pushing this and other ineffective drugs

to end the few remaining lockdown and other public health measures in Brazil.

Across the Pacific, the policies of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi have been equally disastrous. After imposing a lockdown across the country with little warning or planning, which left tens of millions stranded, Modi used the social crisis generated in the aftermath to launch an all-out back-to-work drive. This resulted in a surge in cases that started in May and continues to this day, resulting in more than 10.1 million cases and more than 146,000 recorded deaths.

If the warnings of public health officials, as well as the World Socialist Web Site, had been heeded back in February and March, millions who are now dead would still be alive and the holidays this year would not be overshadowed by the specter of death.

As Karl Marx once wrote, however, there is another specter looming over the capitalist class, the specter of socialist revolution. The past several months have seen an upsurge in the class struggle worldwide, from nurses in the United States to farmers in India. The task now is to arm these struggles, not just with outrage over seeing coworkers, friends and loved ones killed by a preventable pandemic, but with a revolutionary internationalist program to put an end to the underlying disease that is ravaging the world, capitalism, and apply the cure, socialism.



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