

Illinois high school student dies of COVID-19

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Sarah Simental, an 18-year-old high school student from Tinley Park, Illinois, died December 26 just days after becoming sick with COVID-19. About one week before Christmas, Simental became ill with a headache and congestion. By December 23 her condition had rapidly deteriorated and she was taken to Silver Cross Hospital in New Lenox. After it became apparent that she needed intensive care, Simental was airlifted to the University of Chicago Medical Center.

In a video interview shared by the press, Sarah's mother Deborah Simental reported that at first it seemed that her daughter may have only come down with the common cold. However, her symptoms quickly became more concerning. "There was vomiting, and she was getting the chills, and the body aches," said Simental.

After having spent days in the hospital with no signs of improvement and being placed on oxygen machines, Sarah suffered a series of strokes which led to cardiac arrest. The Cook County medical examiner's office reported that Simental's death was the result of acute hypoxic respiratory failure due to COVID-19 infection, with non-traumatic cerebral hemorrhages as a contributing factor. She had no prior health concerns and was in perfect health before becoming infected with COVID-19.

Sarah Simental is now one of 483 Americans aged 15 to 24 years old to have died of COVID-19. Her mother told the press, "Sarah is an example that it can happen to the youngest and healthiest people." Sarah's parents urged that people take the pandemic seriously and wanted to speak out on her daughter's death to demonstrate that young people are also at risk of dying from the pandemic.

Sarah's mother, wanting others to understand her family's pain and hopefully prevent similar tragedies, urged others not to take any risks, saying, "You're going to have a Christmas next year. You're going to

have a Thanksgiving, you're going to have a birthday, and my daughter along with hundreds of thousands of other people are not going to have those things with their family members anymore. You need to take it seriously."

"We are living it and it is an absolute nightmare," Deborah Simental told reporters. In the last conversation between the mother and daughter Sarah told her mother she was sorry that she would miss being home for Christmas. Deborah assured Sarah that she should not worry and that they would celebrate the holiday after she recovered. Deborah said that Sarah replied saying, "Mom, it's going to be okay," before adding through tears, "And that was my last conversation with my daughter."

A senior at Lincoln Way East High School in Frankfort, Illinois, Simental was just a few months from graduating in the spring. In addition to being missed by her family and friends Sarah was known for her love of animals, especially the family's dog Bailey. She was a volunteer at a local pet rescue before having to stop due to the pandemic. Her mother recalled that Sarah often wanted to bring multiple dogs home from the shelter to give them a better home. In her memory, Sarah's family asked that donations be made to the PAWS animal shelter instead of sending flowers at her funeral.

Her life, like the other hundreds of thousands who have died, was cut short by the murderous policy of the US government that has refused to shut down schools, nonessential production and implement lockdowns that would have prevented the spread of the virus.

Sarah's death underscores the recklessness of the plans to reopen schools, which have and will become massive spreading centers of the virus. The claim that young people cannot be seriously affected by the pandemic is a lie. Particularly now, as vaccines have begun to be distributed which can help stop the

pandemic in the future, is it more important than ever to avoid any unnecessary exposure to the virus and continued loss of life.

Despite story after story like Sarah, major cities like San Diego, Chicago, Tacoma, Seattle and New York are preparing to open schools and put millions in danger. In Chicago, where Sarah died, the city is planning to have students and teachers back in the classroom as early as January 11, 2021.

To prevent similar tragedy there must be an immediate shutdown of schools, all nonessential workplaces and consistent resources provided to prevent hunger and homelessness. Only after it has been scientifically proven that enough of the population has been inoculated with the vaccine and otherwise allow for safe gatherings should restrictions be lifted.

Students and youth who want to protect themselves and their families must actively take up this fight. We urge young people to join the International Youth and Students for Social Equality to help build a movement in the working class that can organize a response to the pandemic based on the defense of human life and not the defense of profits.



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