

# Nevada sees record number of COVID-19 deaths

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Workers throughout the state of Nevada and city of Las Vegas have been extremely hard hit by the escalating coronavirus pandemic as it sweeps through the West of the United States. The policy of herd immunity is being deliberately cultivated as casinos, logistics and other industries have continued to operate as normal with little to no protections in place to stop the spread of the virus.

In the last week and a half, Nevada has set single-day records for COVID-19 deaths three times, with 62 and 63 people succumbing to the virus on January 14 and 15, respectively, and then again on January 19, when 71 people died. By contrast, there were 83 deaths in the state in the entire month of June when the state began a limited reopening of nonessential businesses. The three-day death toll this month was more than half the number of deaths for the month of July when the reopening began in earnest.

There were 311 coronavirus deaths two weeks ago, setting a weekly record for Nevada. Previously, the highest number of deaths recording in a week was for the week ending December 19, when there were 231 deaths.

Test positivity rates decreased recently, from 21.6 percent to 19.8 percent, to much fanfare from the establishment media. However, the recent rates were still orders of magnitude higher than the September test positivity rate of 6.2 percent.

It was also only two weeks ago that state health officials declared COVID-19 the leading cause of death for the month of December, when the pandemic claimed 981 lives. The total number of deaths due to COVID-19 in December was 981 and the January figure stands at 886, with another week still to go.

With a population of over 3.1 million, Nevada has had 270,006 cumulative cases of COVID-19. The 14-day average of new cases stands at 1,783 and there were 1,549 hospitalizations on January 22. Thus far, the state has seen a total of 4,027 deaths from COVID-19. Out of 1,050

intensive care unit beds available, 73 percent are currently occupied; of the 762 beds that are occupied, 418 are due to COVID-19.

Democratic Governor Steve Sisolak's response to these grisly numbers has been to continue the economic "pause" instituted in September until the middle of February, which is also when the state plans to reopen schools for in-person instruction. The "pause" simply limits the size of public gatherings to 50 persons and the occupancy rates of (most) businesses to 25 percent. In other words, putting a hold on conventions and limiting attendance at gyms, but doing little to stop the spread of the virus at crowded, poorly ventilated casinos.

Sisolak also announced the signing of a "directive that will place a moratorium on most residential evictions in Nevada, through March 31. The moratorium will apply to tenants unable to pay rent and will not prohibit certain evictions; including for example, lease breaches for things like unlawful activity or nuisance." The moratorium means that those who are unable to pay now will be forced to repay all back rent at a later date or lose their housing.

The rollout of the coronavirus vaccine in Nevada began on December 14, 2020, and as of January 23, 94,188 doses had been administered. The state plans on vaccinating 40,000 to 45,000 people a week but has yet to reach those goals. Further complicating the vaccine rollout, a University of Nevada-Reno study released this weekend claims that over a third of Nevadans say they will refuse the vaccine due to fear and mistrust.

The miserably low rate of vaccine distribution is mainly due, however, to the subordination of public health concerns to the interests of profit and not to individual skepticism. Moreover, a concerted attempt is being made to blame the high rate of COVID-19 infections and low numbers of vaccinations on racism and "white privilege" in order to tamp down popular outrage over the

coronavirus catastrophe.

The *Las Vegas Review Journal*, for example, noting that in the 89110 Vegas area Zip Code there were over 10,000 infections out of a population of 70,000, writes, “The area has a majority Hispanic population, nearly 54 percent, compared with 33 percent in the city overall, according to 2019 data from the US Census Bureau. That helps explain why the disease has run rampant in the area, which encompasses Eldorado and Desert Pines high schools and the Sunrise Library, as Latinos have been hit especially hard by the virus.”

In fact, the population affected by COVID-19 has been overwhelmingly poor and working class, regardless of race. These workers for the most part are engaged in the service economy with little to no medical benefits and a high percentage of intergenerational familial living arrangements. Forty percent of those living in the 89110 Zip Code area are classified as white and have suffered grievously from the pandemic as well.

According to the *Review Journal*, one solution to the pandemic is through a homicidal school reopening policy. Opening schools will allow children to receive free meals and help parents get back to work, they argue. Nothing is mentioned, however, about studies indicating that children often carry a viral load 10 to 100 times more than adults even if they are less likely to exhibit symptoms. There is also the alarming emergence of Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome or MIS-C in children across the country.

The Nevada government, like its counterparts throughout the US, has worked hand in glove with corporations and the wealthy in their response to the pandemic. The multi-billion-dollar Las Vegas casino industry, in particular, has benefited handsomely from lax coronavirus regulations. Casinos have been operating at or above 50 percent capacity since the city’s reopening in July.

Moreover, the casinos are under no obligation to accurately count infection rates among workers, particularly among floor workers who have regular face to face interactions with customers at gaming tables and other areas.

One worker who spoke to the WSWs and wished to remain anonymous related how her coworkers all of a sudden “disappear” from the floor without explanation. Those who remain wonder what’s happened until they receive confirmation on social media or through direct contact that a coworker is positive for COVID-19. They are left wondering if they’ll be the next to leave the floor,

knowing that they had been in close proximity to the affected worker.

The Culinary Union represents about 60,000 workers at casino and resort properties throughout Nevada and has done little to protect workers from the ravages of the virus other than initiate a few lawsuits against individual casinos. The only planned job action to date was planned in order to force Wynn Resorts to schedule full-time employees for 40-hour workweeks. After Wynn threatened to lay off workers, the union caved and shelved all talk of strike action.

The UAW, which represents dealers, slot attendants, cage and count workers as well as retail workers at some properties, has also done nothing to protect its members. Workers who spoke with the WSWs said they haven’t heard a word from the union since they came back from furlough. One worker said that a lot of people were worried, but there was not much that they could do. A lot of the older workers are opting for early retirement if they can afford it, and most people are taking as many no-times (day off with no pay) as they can afford.

Coronavirus testing is almost nonexistent at most casinos while even temperature screening, which is only slightly better than useless for detecting coronavirus cases, is only performed sporadically and, at least at one casino, only on employees. At another casino, where smoking is allowed, one dice dealer stated, “Which I find to be ridiculous,” as it completely negates the mask mandate as they lean back and exhale. The dealer also said that while they used to clean the chips at regular intervals, it has become more sporadic as time has passed.

The response of the ruling class to the pandemic, supported by the trade unions, will be to continue to subordinate the lives and interests of workers to the pandemic profiteers. Workers’ lives need not be sacrificed for the profits of a few. The Socialist Equality Party calls on workers to defend their interests by forming rank-and-file safety committees and making the decision to join the SEP.



To contact the WSWs and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

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