

# Nine-year-old schoolboy dies from COVID-19 in Texas

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3 February 2021

On Tuesday, January 29, 9-year-old J.J. Boatman of Vernon, Texas, died from COVID-19. His parents fear that he acquired the virus while at school, which he had attended the previous Friday, just four days prior to his death. As late as Sunday night, J.J. was playing at home and seemed in good health.

J.J., who had celebrated his birthday earlier in January, died on the same day as another Texas child—a one-year-old in Tarrant County, the youngest person to die from COVID-19 in the county. These two deaths of young children were among 29 deaths in the county on that day alone.

J.J.'s father, Jason Boatman, described his son as "the life of this house," and told a local ABC News affiliate, "I can't imagine living without that boy here."

Jason said that on Monday morning J.J. was wheezing. After leaving for work, his son's health took a turn for the worse. His wife Priscilla told him that J.J. was "purple, blue and screaming that he couldn't breathe. He was yelling for help." She rushed him to the local hospital in Vernon, where doctors performed CPR. They quickly made the decision to move him to a better-equipped hospital, and J.J. was flown to Cook Children's Hospital in Fort Worth.

Upon arriving, physicians determined that J.J.'s lungs were filled with fluid. They told his parents that his brain had swollen due to lack of oxygen, and that he had tested positive for COVID-19. Jason told the media, "The nurse came in and told me that his heart was failing, and that's what happened." The young boy was placed on a ventilator and died 12 hours later.

Boatman told reporters, "They had done X-rays, and they say your lungs are supposed to be black when you do X-rays, but his were completely white."

Across the US, there has been a growth in the rate of pediatric hospitalizations in recent months. According

to a study published in *JAMA Pediatrics*, hospitalization rates among children in 22 states rose from 2 per 100,000 to 17.2 per 100,000, or almost 9 times, between May 15 and November 15, 2020.

There has also been an increase in Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C), which, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), is a condition where "different body parts can become inflamed, including the heart, lungs, kidneys, brain, skin, eyes, or gastrointestinal organs." The Tarrant County medical examiner has not yet released a cause of death for J.J., so it is not known at this time if his death was attributable to MIS-C.

According to the family, J.J. had ADHD and took medication to help him sleep. While some initial news stories reported that J.J. suffered from asthma, family members have since said that this was not the case.

Several media outlets have quoted an anonymous emergency room doctor, who stated that child deaths are rare and speculated the boy may have had an underlying condition of which his parents were unaware.

Even if this were true, it would not justify in-person learning in schools, where children—some of whom may have particular physical vulnerabilities—are routinely exposed to COVID-19.

Wilbarger County, where Vernon is located, has had nearly 1,800 confirmed COVID-19 cases out of a population of just over 13,500. Despite this, schools have been operating in-person since the fall, and basketball and other sporting events continue.

Central Elementary School, where J.J. attended, was closed for only one week following his death. It reopened on February 1, meaning that students like J.J. who were possibly exposed to the virus in the classroom were only out of school for five days. This is

well below even Texas's paltry guidelines, which state that schools should shutter for at least 10 days following signs of an outbreak.

The death of J.J. is an enormous tragedy, and he is one of over 100 children who have died from COVID-19 in the US. Every effort must be made to put an end to the policies that have vastly increased the spread of COVID-19, above all the opening of schools and nonessential workplaces as the pandemic rages out of control.

The Texas Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee is fighting to organize the enormous opposition to the homicidal policies of the ruling elites. In unity with committees in Chicago, New York City, Los Angeles, Michigan, Tennessee, Pennsylvania, Alabama, and a growing number of cities and states, we are fighting to unite educators and all workers across district and state lines in preparations for a nationwide general strike. We urge all Texas educators, parents and students to sign up today to get involved !



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