

Colleges and universities in the US once again emerge as COVID-19 hotspots

Emily Ochiai, Genevieve Leigh
5 March 2021

According to new data collected by a *New York Times* survey, COVID-19 cases have exploded at colleges and universities throughout the US since campuses have reopened for in-person learning. Predictably, campuses across the country are seeing COVID-19 outbreaks in the tens of thousands as students return for the spring semester.

The most recent *New York Times*, updated March 3, revealed that more than 17 colleges observed over 1,000 cases of new infections since the start of the year. The University of Florida recorded a total of 2,138 new cases on campus for 2021 alone. Arizona State University has 1,822 cases, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison has recorded 1,664 cases. Based on the survey, approximately 120,000 new cases this year have been directly linked to colleges and universities.

Major infection outbreaks and new records on universities across the United States are flooding in daily. A massive outbreak was recently reported at the University of Virginia, with 220 university employees and 1,335 students testing positive out of a student population of 25,000.

The University of Delaware, where students are living on-campus and taking in-person classes for the current semester, recorded 324 new cases among students and employees last week. This figure is five times higher than the previous week, a staggering increase.

Dartmouth logged 119 new cases just over the past weekend. At the University of Michigan, where case numbers account for 62 percent of all Washtenaw County cases, there were 352 new cases reported in a week, the highest infection number in a single week since the start of the pandemic in the county. In addition, three individuals at the university have tested positive for the new highly infectious variant of

the COVID-19.

There are presently 164 buildings closed because of COVID-19 cases discovered among students and staff school across multiple classrooms in just the last week.

Situations like these are shared among countless universities all over the United States since the start of the spring semester.

Of the 1,900 universities surveyed, a total of 102 universities had over 100 percent growth rate, meaning case numbers in 2021 exceeded case numbers in 2020. Among these universities, significant examples were Fairmont State University with a 295 percent growth rate and 236 cases of new infections this year; Jackson State University with a 271 percent growth rate and 160 new cases; Santa Clara University with a 256 growth rate and 243 new cases; and University of California, Davis with a 230 percent growth rate with 283 new cases.

The growth rate was calculated by the *New York Times* by taking the ratio of 2021 cases to 2020 cases. Readers must keep in mind that each institution's method of counting was inconsistent. For example, some colleges subtract cases from their tallies once people have recovered. Some colleges only report tests performed on campus, and some did not provide full data, therefore, making the data incomplete.

The reckless reopening of colleges and universities comes on the heels of the fall semester in which more than 85 campuses reported at least 1,000 cases each—with some registering well over 5,000. More than 75,000 COVID-19 cases were confirmed in the last month of the fall semester alone. During the fall semester, there were more than 90 deaths involving college employees and students.

The dangerous myth that the virus only threatens the older generation was exposed to be a complete lie with

more than 100 deaths of university students and many more suffering from long-term effects, such as damage to the lung, heart and brain.

Additionally, one critical lesson from the fall was that the spread of the virus among students and faculty was not contained to college campuses. Towns and cities with colleges that reopened for in-person learning, or which, for one reason or another, allowed large numbers of students to return to their dorms, quickly became some of the worst hot spots in the country.

Despite the vast wealth of scientific data showing the dangers of reopening schools for in-person learning, dozens of colleges and universities, along with hundreds of K-12 school districts, have opened their doors.

The threat of death or serious illness from the virus to educators, students, their families and the community at large is immense.

Behind this reckless policy stands the Democratic Party, which has spearheaded the spring reopening campaign with local and state officials implementing Biden's goal of fully reopening the majority of schools by the end of April.

In tandem with school reopenings, politicians from both parties are loosening other restrictions on in-person gatherings, reopening bars, restaurants and other indoor venues. With more infectious, lethal and potentially vaccine-resistant variants of SARS-CoV-2 spreading throughout the country, the conditions are ripe for a massive surge of cases that will result in needless suffering and deaths.

It is urgently necessary to close all schools and non-essential workplaces until the pandemic is brought under control and the population is fully vaccinated.

Mobilizing educators and the broader working class to oppose this policy and implement the necessary measures to contain the pandemic is a life-and-death question.

Over the past year, the Socialist Equality Party has fought for the creation of networks of rank-and-file safety committees among educators, students and other sections of the working class in the US and around the world. These committees are the center of opposition to the ruling elite's homicidal policies.

Educators, students and other workers who are determined to put an end to the reckless reopening policies can join a rank-and-file committee near them

or help start one by contacting the WSWs today.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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