

As US states reopen businesses and schools, experts warn of “hurricane” surge of COVID-19

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With states throughout the US reopening businesses and schools, health experts are warning of a surge of COVID-19 cases in the coming months as new variants take hold across the country.

Epidemiologists and other health care experts warned Sunday that the current plateau in the number of coronavirus infections in the United States is only temporary and could be followed by a new and more terrible upsurge, particularly if the American population follows the lead of state governments that are ending mask mandates and other restrictions.

The starkest warning came from Dr. Michael Osterholm, a former coronavirus adviser to the Biden transition and director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota. He appeared on the NBC program “Meet the Press” and declared, “we are in the eye of the hurricane right now. It appears that things are going very well. You can see blue skies.” But the reality was a new storm coming, he said.

He cited the upsurge in B117, the so-called UK variant, which has gone from one to four percent of the viruses analyzed four weeks ago to 30-40 percent today. “And what we’ve seen in Europe, when we hit that 50 percent mark, you see cases surge. So right now, we do have to keep America as safe as we can from this virus by not letting up on any of the public health measures we’ve taken. And we need to get people vaccinated as quickly as we can.”

While congratulating the Biden administration on speeding up vaccine distribution, he pointed out that more than half of American seniors, the most vulnerable age group in terms of coronavirus deaths, have still not been vaccinated, including large numbers

living in long-term care facilities.

Dr. Osterholm added a warning about school reopenings, pointing out that the B117 variant is especially infectious in school settings and that large clusters of infections have been found in his home state of Minnesota, connected with the resumption of high school sports. At this point his host Chuck Todd hurriedly ended the interview.

On other Sunday programs, experts linked more closely to the Biden administration limited their comments to warning about the impact of the lifting of mask mandates. Seventeen US states have either lifted mandates or never had them in the first place, with Texas becoming the first state with a large urban population to do so.

Dr. Anthony Fauci told the CBS program “Face the Nation” that the recent decline in cases is starting to plateau, and that “plateauing at a level of 60,000-70,000 new cases per day is not an acceptable level. That is really very high.” Judging from the example of Europe, where the plateau several weeks ago was followed by an increase in cases, he warned that this was a real danger. “It really would be risky to have yet again another surge,” he concluded.

On ABC News, Dr. Ashish Jha of Brown University, another former Biden transition adviser, tried to put a more favorable spin on the figures, but admitted the utter waste in new deaths caused by a relaxation of restrictions and mask mandates. “Anybody who gets infected today and dies in three or four weeks is somebody who would have gotten vaccinated a month from now,” he said. “This is why it’s urgent to just keep going for a little bit longer.”

All these warnings came as news programs showed

scenes of thousands of unmasked and undistanced revelers on Florida beaches during spring break, encouraged by Governor Ron DeSantis and other state officials, who have portrayed the “right” to infect others and to become infected as the essence of “freedom.” This under conditions where young people in the 17-25 age bracket can contract COVID-19 and spread it just as easily as any other age group.

At a press conference on Friday in Geneva, the top officials of the World Health Organization made even more dire warnings. WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus pointed especially to the huge upsurge in cases in Brazil, which has gone from 114,000 cases a week in November to 374,000 cases a week in February, and from 2,500 deaths a week to 8,000 deaths a week over the same period. During this period, Brazil has become the launching pad for many new variants of the virus, some more infectious or more resistant to antibodies.

Dr. Michael Ryan, WHO director for health emergencies, said that “exiting” from social measures imposed to limit the pandemic had to be carried out with great care and required resuming strong contact tracing and other preventive measures that have been largely abandoned in the worst hit countries. He was particularly concerned about the abandonment of mask wearing and social distancing. “I understand what’s driving this. We think we’re out of this, but we’re not,” he warned. “We should not waste the hope that vaccines bring by dropping our guard in other areas.”

These warnings, whether open and direct or hedged about with considerations of a political and diplomatic character, are consistent in their thrust: the apparent success of vaccinations, at least in a few countries, does not alter the reality of a global pandemic. The most rigorous protective measures are still required, both in countries where vaccination has had some impact, as in the United States and parts of Europe, and in those, like most of Latin America, Africa, and Asia, where mass vaccination is still an empty promise.

The lifting of protective measures in many American states and the outright repudiation of them by heads of state like Brazil’s fascist President Jair Bolsonaro are crimes against humanity. This label applies as well to the back-to-school drive embraced by the Biden administration and enforced by state and local governments headed by the Democratic Party.

Earlier this week, Arizona Governor Doug Ducey, a Republican, ordered all elementary schools to offer in-person education, which will be followed by middle and high schools.

Areas controlled by Democrats are likewise moving ahead with school reopenings. Chicago will allow middle school students to return to class starting today, while the San Francisco School District said Friday it will reopen schools starting April 12. On Friday, the Massachusetts Education Board pushed ahead with the reopening of schools by granting the state education commissioner control over when in-person education can resume, in defiance of local authorities.

The reality of the policy being carried by the American ruling class was stated most brutally by Governor Tate Reeves of Mississippi, speaking Sunday on CNN’s “State of the Union” program. “Our objective in Mississippi has never been to rid ourselves of the virus or make sure that no Mississippian actually gets the virus,” he said, “because we don’t think that’s a realistic goal.” He added, “our approach has been to not only protect lives, but to also protect livelihoods. We have to get our economy rolling, so that individuals can get back to work.”

Whether enunciated with the Southern drawl of Reeves, the incoherent bromides of Joe Biden or the fascist rants of Bolsonaro, the policy of the financial aristocracy is the same. Coronavirus policy is subordinated to the defense of the capitalist system. The profit requirements of the corporations and banks take precedence over the health of workers and their families.



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