

Coronavirus pandemic resurges throughout the world

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As the different variants of the SARS-CoV-2 virus continue to spread, particularly those originating in the United Kingdom, Brazil, and South Africa, reported cases of the coronavirus have again begun to rise.

Since February 20, the number of daily new cases worldwide has increased steadily, from 361,000 cases then, to more than 422,000 cases now, up 17 percent. The increase is being driven in countries across the world. Currently there are more than 22,000 new cases each day in India (an 80 percent increase), just under 25,000 in France (a 24 percent increase), and 22,000 in Italy (an 83 percent increase). The main driver of the new wave is Brazil, where there are at least 66,000 new cases each day (a 36 percent increase) and climbing.

The total number of cases worldwide has now exceeded 120 million, with more than 2,660,000 dead.

Numerous other countries have also seen steady, and in some cases sharp, increases in their case counts, including Chile, the Czech Republic, Ethiopia, Germany, Iran, Paraguay, Poland and the Philippines. And in the United States, where the decline in cases has largely plateaued, there is still an average of more than 55,000 new reported cases each day.

There is every indication that this new wave, if allowed to continue, will be the worst yet. The previous wave was spurred on by relatively limited school and workplace reopenings, driving the number of new cases each day from just under 300,000 at the beginning of October to 745,000 at the beginning of January. Globally, more than 900,000 people died during that three-month period.

The social misery produced by such a state of affairs is staggering. Bloomberg recently reported that 30 million people in Africa were plunged into extreme poverty by the pandemic in 2020, living on less than \$1.90 a day, and an estimated 39 million people will be made equally destitute in 2021. The United Nations reports that poverty in Latin America rose in 2020 by 22 million people. The

number of “new poor” in East Asia and the Pacific increased by at least 38 million.

Globally, the World Bank estimates that between 119 to 124 million people so far have been impoverished by the coronavirus pandemic.

“After the Second World War, the world has experienced mass trauma, because the Second World War affected many, many lives. And now, even with this COVID pandemic, with bigger magnitude, more lives have been affected,” WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said at a news conference Friday. “Almost the whole world is affected, each and every individual on the surface of the world actually has been affected.”

Now, with case numbers higher than they were at the beginning of the last surge, the Biden administration is spearheading an even more complete return to in-person schooling and work. Countries in Europe, South America, Asia and elsewhere are following suit, effectively inducing an even greater expansion of the pandemic. The ongoing reopenings in the United States and around the world are setting the stage for even greater heights of mass death.

The excuse being force-fed to the American and world public is that this is safe because the vaccine rollout is continuing apace.

The truth is quite the opposite. Even in the US, which has one of the highest vaccination rates, only about 10 percent of the population is fully vaccinated, meaning that the majority of the population is still susceptible to the deadly virus.

Moreover, the rollout itself is characterized by “many examples of vaccine nationalism and vaccine hoarding,” according to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. The Biden administration has openly admitted hoarding doses of the vaccine, including about 10 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine, for which the FDA has yet to

give emergency authorization. AstraZeneca itself asked to transfer those doses to Europe, where it can be used. The idea was rejected out of hand, with Biden's COVID-19 response coordinator Jeff Zients proclaiming Friday, "We're rightly focused on getting Americans vaccinated as soon as possible."

In other words, Biden has fully embraced the "America First" policy of ex-President Trump's Operation Warp Speed.

Vaccine nationalism has also emerged sharply in Europe. Last week, Italy blocked the export of 250,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine to Australia. Tensions between the UK and European Union continued as European Council President Charles Michel accused London of imposing an export ban on COVID-19 vaccines.

As a result, while more than 350 million doses of the coronavirus vaccine have been administered internationally, three-quarters of those have been given in just 10 countries, including more than 100 million in the United States alone. In contrast, less than five percent of the population in South America has received even a single dose. In Africa, where the total number of deaths just passed 100,000, less than half of one percent of the population has been vaccinated.

This uneven distribution itself has the potential to drive the pandemic. As Dr. Tedros recently noted, "The inequitable distribution of vaccines remains the biggest threat to ending the pandemic and driving a global recovery," because "the longer the virus circulates, the higher the chances that variants will emerge that make vaccines less effective."

In other words, there is nothing "right," much less at all rational, about hoarding millions of life-saving vaccines in the middle of a pandemic. Every dose that is not used is a lost opportunity for an infection to be stopped, another life saved. It is also more opportunity for the virus to mutate, increasing the chances of a variant emerging completely immune to the vaccines, retriggering the entire pandemic. Dr. Tedros rightly condemned this when he noted, "This is putting lives at risk around the world."

Dr. Michael Osterholm, an infectious disease expert at the University of Minnesota, made similar comments in a recent piece entitled, "COVID-19 Variants and the Peril of Vaccine Inequity." In it, he writes:

Neither the United States nor any other global power can defeat a pandemic by thinking in

national terms. COVID-19 vaccines are now a central component of the United States' national security and defense. But unlike other spheres of defense, this one involves protecting—not fighting—foreigners. As the poet John Donne noted centuries ago, 'No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.' Never has that been truer than during the current worldwide plague. If the bell continues to toll, it will be tolling for us all.

As has been demonstrated over the past year, however, appeals to the ruling class fall on deaf ears. Neither the Trump nor Biden administrations, or their counterparts internationally, are capable, much less interested, in sharing the vaccine. Stockpiles are viewed as strategic assets to be wielded against geopolitical rivals, not medicine to save lives.

As David North writes in his essay, "Capitalism vs. socialism: The pandemic and the global class struggle":

The capitalist program promotes a policy of vaccination nationalism, restricting and opposing equitable distribution of vaccines throughout the world. The socialist program, recognizing that the coronavirus can be eradicated only through a scientifically directed international strategy, calls for a globally coordinated inoculation program.

There can be no national solution to the pandemic. The social system bound up with the existence of nation-states, capitalism, must end and be replaced with a socialist society based on the democratic and scientific planning of the world's resources, where human lives are placed above private profit.



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