

Michigan's Democratic governor rules out new restrictions despite COVID-19 surge

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31 March 2021

Despite the vaccine campaign being pushed throughout the nation, cases of COVID-19 have continued their climb in the United States, up 15 percent from two weeks ago, averaging about 63,000 new cases of COVID-19 each day. Presently, there have been 31.1 million cases of COVID-19, with almost 565,000 deaths attributed to complications from the infection since last March.

The situation is currently most dire in Michigan, where the B.1.1.7 variant combined with school reopenings and the relaxation of mitigation measures has seen an explosion of COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations. On March 31, the number of new cases surpassed 7,100. By comparison, the all-time one-day high occurred on November 20, with just over 10,000 cases of COVID-19. The seven-day moving average is now exceeding 5,400 daily cases of COVID-19, up from the February lows of around 1,000 daily cases. The test positivity rate has climbed to 15.6 percent.

St. Clair County, Michigan, bordering the west bank of St. Clair River, has seen the highest increase in new cases in the state with a two-week change of 145 percent, nearly ten-fold higher than the national increase. Hospitalizations in the county are up 141 percent over the last 14 days.

However, speaking on CNN Wednesday, Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer defended her actions to relax restrictions in the state and only proposed that residents wear masks and get vaccinated.

Deflecting the question on reinstating new restrictions, Whitmer spoke in her usual folksy political jargon, “We’re continuing to have robust conversations. Yesterday morning I had a restaurant owner asking if we could lift the curfew because of the Michigan game last night. Unfortunately, Michigan

didn’t win, but the point still is that there’s a lot of push and pull. What we need to do is double down on our masking and get more people vaccinated.”

Up to 8,000 fans will be allowed to fill the stands at Comerica Park today to watch opening day for the Detroit Tigers baseball team in a city which has been one of the worst hit during the pandemic.

Meanwhile, Michigan has vaccinated just 28.6 percent of its population with at least one jab so far. When or if herd immunity will be achieved remains a theoretical debate.

In a similar vein, President Joe Biden’s response to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Rochelle Walensky’s astonishing remarks this week warning of “impending doom” was to ask governors to reinstate mask mandates if they had removed them. He added, “We’re in the life-and-death race for the virus that is spreading quickly, with cases rising again, new variants are spreading.” Yet, he has taken no responsibility or shown any concerns that his drive to reopen schools has placed the US in this predicament.

The *Detroit Free Press* reported that Beaumont Health, Michigan’s most extensive health care system, has the highest number of COVID-19 inpatients in the state, with over 500 admitted to their hospitals. On February 28, a little more than four weeks ago, there were only 128 COVID-19 inpatients. Additionally, Beaumont is maneuvering to expand COVID-19 units at all its hospital sites in anticipation of the impact of the present surge.

The health system also announced they were calling together their “system labor pool,” meaning managing their nurses and doctors’ staff to cope with the influx of patients. Dr. Nick Gilpin, Beaumont Health’s medical director of infection prevention and epidemiology, who

has been providing regular press updates on the pandemic situation, said, “We continue to monitor numbers very, very closely and are instituting changes from Incident Command Centers to best care for our patients. Expanding COVID-19 units at the sites is a result of that, and we are working hard to provide the best care in the region.”

One noticeable difference that has gone into effect at Beaumont is that visitors and family members who have been fully vaccinated fourteen days past their final dose and can show proof of vaccination may visit loved ones who are not infected or suspected of having COVID-19.

Beaumont Health’s CEO John Fox explained, “We recognize that patients recuperate better when they have someone dear to them nearby. So, we are working hard to balance safety with compassionate family support as we lead the way through the pandemic.”

Meanwhile, those suffering from COVID-19 must still go it alone. It would be more compassionate for the health systems to demand Governor Gretchen Whitmer implement an immediate lockdown to stem the current surge. That thousands will need to be hospitalized or die from COVID-19 as vaccines are being administered to the population is absolutely a criminal act on the part of the state.

However, the state officials have no stomach for implementing broad-based restrictions that would undermine profits. Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Director Elizabeth Hertel expressed the ruling elite’s plan for the pandemic in its second year, “At this point in the pandemic, we are in a race against time. A race to safely vaccinate as many residents as possible and at the same time drive down our current COVID-19 trends.”

She added during the press brief, “Until we get to a point where we believe we are at a place that our hospitals cannot handle the capacity that is coming in, we will continue to urge the mitigation measures in place so that we can continue to re-engage.”

A recent report in the online publication Bridge Michigan found that outbreaks of COVID-19 jumped 20 percent in just one week in Michigan schools prompting official concern about the wisdom of keeping classrooms open, especially as students return from spring break. The interim superintendent of Birmingham Public Schools, George Heitsch, bluntly

stated, “It feels like you’re walking on a tightrope over the Grand Canyon, and you don’t want to take the wrong step. You worry about it every day.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* reported on March 21 that between February 12 to March 11 there had been 146 outbreaks in K-12 schools, accounting for 28 percent of all infections in the state, representing the largest source of infections from any public or private institution. In the course of that time, daily case rates had tripled.

As of March 25, there have been 241 new or ongoing outbreaks tied to K-12 schools and preschools, according to the state’s data. The number of confirmed cases among students and staff involved in these outbreaks had leaped 16 percent. Notably, Governor Whitmer told Bridge Michigan, “You look at a map and you know that it’s young people that are spreading it right now in Michigan.” The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, however, confirmed that there were no plans to close schools across the state.



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