

Whitmer and Biden refuse to fight surging pandemic in Michigan

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Yesterday, 10,227 new cases of COVID-19 were reported in Michigan, the state's highest daily toll since the pandemic began over a year ago. And for the seventh week in a row, K-12 schools were Michigan's number one source of COVID-19 outbreaks, followed once again by manufacturing and construction job sites. Yet Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer continues to refuse to order schools to go virtual and nonessential workplaces to close.

Michiganders caught COVID-19 at a rate of over 7,000 per day over the last week, numbers not seen in the state since last Thanksgiving, the peak of the fall/winter surge. The state continues to lead the US with 78.7 new cases for every 100,000 residents. The next highest state-wide case rate is 43.5 in Rhode Island.

In virtually every part of the state, the pandemic is spreading like wildfire. Sixty-one of Michigan's 83 counties saw more than 50 cases per 100,000 residents on April 13. The rural "thumb" area north of Detroit is especially dangerous, with the counties of Lapeer, Tuscola, and Sanilac all above 100 daily new cases per 100,000 residents, and St. Clair and Huron counties both over 150, according to the website CovidActNow.

COVID-19 hospitalizations in Michigan are now at their highest levels ever, surpassing anything seen in previous surges, and health care is now being rationed across the state to make room for more patients. The situation is so severe that even Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky called Monday for Governor Whitmer "to really close things down, to go back to our basics, to go back to where we were last spring, last summer, and to shut things down."

Michigan's new surge is fueled by the B.1.1.7 variant, which is now dominant across the US. This variant is also up to 75 percent more contagious than wild-type COVID-19, and it thrives among children. B.1.1.7 is more concentrated in Michigan than in any other state, accounting for an estimated 70 percent of new cases there.

The first case of B.1.1.7 in Michigan was detected on January 16 in Washtenaw County. This was also the lowest point in the curve of K-12 school outbreaks in the state. Having reached 56 new outbreaks per week before Thanksgiving break, this number was down to just 2 per week for the first weeks of January. The downward trend in the daily case rate started when the state's health department ordered high schools to close for the remainder of the semester on November 18. The rate fell off dramatically when all schools closed as normal for winter break.

But as B.1.1.7 took hold in Michigan and schools reopened for the new semester, outbreaks in schools skyrocketed to unseen heights, reaching 81 per week by April 5. This rise *preceded* the surge in case rates across Michigan, which shows that not only are schools vectors for transmission when community spread is already high, but that they actually serve as a catalyst for community spread.

But Whitmer continues to refuse to order even a limited lockdown of schools or workplaces. She maintains that "Michigan doesn't have a policy problem, we have a compliance problem." This is an effort to shift blame for the new surge onto individual "problem" workers and youth, who won't "comply" with the Governor's completely voluntary recommendations to wear a mask inside Michigan's cramped schools and factories and to order takeout instead of dining out at restaurants, which she has also allowed to remain open for in-person dining.

In the spring and summer of 2020, as the pandemic first hit Michigan, Whitmer issued emergency executive orders to shut down all schools and some non-essential businesses. But on October 2, the Michigan Supreme Court ruled in *Midwest Institute of Health, PLLC v. Governor* that Whitmer's legal basis for ordering schools to go completely virtual was invalid.

The Democrats have presented this decision as an

insurmountable barrier, foisted upon Whitmer by hostile Republicans, which completely prevents her from taking any measures to shut down schools. However, a brief examination shows that this is far from the case.

At the time, the Michigan Supreme Court was comprised of four Republican justices: Stephen Markman, Brian K. Zahra, David Viviano, and Elizabeth T. Clement; and three Democrats: Megan Cavanagh, Bridget Mary McCormack, and Richard H. Bernstein.

The emergency powers case challenged two laws—one from 1945 and another from 1976—that Whitmer had used to justify her closure of schools. To keep schools closed, all that was needed was for the court to rule that either one of these laws was both constitutional and granted the Governor the authority to order a lockdown.

Whitmer lost on both counts. The 1945 law was ruled unconstitutional by a party-line vote of the four Republican justices versus the three Democrats.

However, all three Democratic justices joined with the Republicans to rule unanimously that the 1976 law did not authorize the Governor to indefinitely close schools, showing that they were just as prepared to sink Whitmer's school closures as their Republican colleagues.

Moreover, a month after the ruling, as daily new cases in the state surpassed 7,000 for the first time and outbreaks in schools were exploding, the director of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Robert Gordon issued a “Gatherings and Facemasks” order in his own name, which brought in-person instruction at high schools to an end from November 18 through the end of the year. The order states: “Gatherings at public, nonpublic, and boarding schools for the purpose of conducting in-person instruction, sports, and extracurricular activities serving pupils in grades 9 through 12 are prohibited.”

The laws that Director Gordon cited as justification for the November order have not been challenged by anyone, and the MDHHS continues to cite them as a basis for updated Gatherings and Facemasks orders. However, the newest such order explicitly states that “gatherings at public, nonpublic, and boarding schools are permitted for the purpose of conducting in-person instruction.”

President Joe Biden has now repeatedly rejected calls to send a “surge” of vaccines to Michigan to counter the rise of the pandemic in Michigan. His administration is walking a tightrope, trying to continue to force open schools across the country while ignoring the growing number of infections and deaths as well as the dire warnings of experts. But the catastrophe in Michigan

shows what the rest of the country could soon face if immediate action is not taken.

The subject of COVID-19 in Michigan's schools is also being blacked out and downplayed by the mainstream media. In particular, the *New York Times* is covering up the fact that Michigan's schools are its top source of COVID-19 transmission.

In its two major articles on the pandemic in Michigan published Monday (“Surging Virus Has Michigan's Democratic Governor at Loggerheads With Biden,” and “The C.D.C. director says Michigan needs to shut down, not get extra vaccine, to slow its virus outbreak”) the *Times* claims that Michigan's outbreak is “driven by a highly infectious virus variant, loosened restrictions, travel, youth sporting events and uneven compliance with the remaining rules.” The quoted passage appears in both articles, neither of which mention the hundreds of outbreaks at Michigan schools or workplaces since the present surge began in February.

Likewise, the *Times*' page “Tracking Coronavirus in Michigan: Latest Map and Case Count” includes a section called “Outbreak clusters,” which completely omits K-12 schools and almost all workplaces. They falsely present colleges, prisons, nursing homes, and two meat-packing plants as the main sources of outbreaks. The word “school” does not appear on the page.

The situation in Michigan is a warning to the world: the ruling class, whether represented by Democrats like Whitmer and Biden or Republicans like Trump, is set on reopening schools and workplaces, even if it means knowingly infecting thousands of schoolchildren, teachers and other workers with a deadly virus. Trillions of dollars have already been funneled upward to the ruling elite over the last year, while 2.7 million have died as a result of the policies pursued by capitalist governments around the world.



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