

COVID-19 deaths surge in Michigan

Bryan Dyne
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Michigan, the center of auto production in the United States, is facing the deadliest wave of COVID-19 anywhere in the country. Since the beginning of the month, more than 1,200 Michigan residents have died from COVID-19. The 7-day average of daily deaths has more than quadrupled from its low in mid-March, from 16 lives lost per day to 67.

Michigan hospitals are now admitting twice the number of those in their 30s and 40s compared to during the fall and winter peak, according to data aggregated by the Michigan Health & Hospital Association. Like last spring, hospitals are once again implementing “surge protocols” to handle the emergency.

Despite the disaster, however, Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer has rejected the necessary measures to contain the disease, including closing schools, limiting after-school activities or shutting bars. In an effort to blame the population for the outbreak, Whitmer has insisted that the state has a “compliance problem,” not a “policy problem.”

Whitmer’s inaction has led scientists and public health experts to demand emergency measures to contain the pandemic. “As a matter of disease mitigation, there’s no question” that closing schools and other restrictions would slow transmission and save lives, Dr. Joshua Sharfstein, associate dean for Public Health Practice and Training at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, told the *Detroit Free Press*. He urged that “stronger action” be “seriously considered.”

Children have also been increasingly hard hit, in Michigan and nationally. At least 70 were in intensive care last week in the state, double the number during the worst days of last November. The American Academy of Pediatrics reported that the 10–19 age group had the most new infections in the second week of April, averaging 1,150 new cases each day.

Nationally, children now make up about 1 in 5 new cases, and at least 582 deaths have been caused by the deadly contagion.

These figures give the lie to the claims of US President Joe Biden, who told a second-grader in February, “Kids don’t get ... COVID very often. It’s unusual for that to happen.” He added, “You’re in the safest group of people in the whole world.”

In fact, a recent study done in Nebraska shows that children are extremely vulnerable to COVID-19. By regularly testing both staff and students, infection rates were found to be two-and-a-half times higher for staff and nearly six times higher among students than what had been revealed by self-initiated tests. This and numerous other accounts make clear that children are more likely to be asymptomatic while functioning as carriers and spreaders of the virus.

Michigan’s latest surge of new cases is predominantly driven by the B.1.1.7 variant of the coronavirus, first identified in the United Kingdom. It is estimated to be 60 percent more contagious and 67 percent more deadly. It has emerged as the dominant mutation of the coronavirus in the United States and now causes an estimated 70 percent of cases in Michigan.

Before the new variant took hold this past winter, twice as many of those 65 and older who contracted the virus were hospitalized as compared to those younger. Now, the reverse is true, with data from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showing that adults in their 20s to 50s are the most hospitalized in Michigan, as well as Minnesota, New Jersey and North Carolina.

According to data from the state of Michigan, the greatest driver of new outbreaks are schools and universities, followed by workplaces such as factories and warehouses.

The disaster has only been exacerbated by the big

three automakers, who have done everything possible to conceal outbreaks at their plants. Auto workers at multiple plants have told the WSWS that management refuses to tell workers when their coworkers have tested positive for COVID-19, making it impossible for workers to quarantine.

In rejecting any measures to contain the disease, Whitmer has capitulated to the demands of Trump and his fascistic supporters. In October 2020, the FBI revealed the existence of a far-reaching fascist plot to kidnap Whitmer and overthrow the state government, centered on the demand that she reopen schools and workplaces.

Now, nearly six months later, Whitmer has effectively embraced the policies of the coup plotters, refusing to take any measures to contain the pandemic that would impinge on the profits of the auto bosses that run the state.

The past year has made clear that if things are left to the capitalists and their subservient politicians, the disease will never be stopped, and workers will continue to die by the thousands. It is urgently necessary to close all non-essential production, with full compensation for all lost income for workers, contractors and small business people.

Already, workers in key sections of the US auto industry are beginning to take action, forming rank-and-file committees throughout the state to defend workers' lives and livelihoods. On May Day 2021, the International Committee of the Fourth International is issuing the call for the formation of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, aiming to enforce the measures necessary to contain the pandemic and save human lives.

The International Committee of the Fourth International is advancing this initiative to provide a political program for workers, both to fight the pandemic and to end the social system, capitalism, which is responsible for the worldwide catastrophe. We urge workers throughout Michigan, the United States and the world to attend.



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