

Canadian single mother infected by COVID-19: “They said schools are safe. They said kids cannot get it. Liars!”

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Lily, a single mother from Vancouver, British Columbia, recently spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* about her experiences after getting infected with COVID-19. Having likely caught the virus from one of her two kids, who were forced to attend school by the reckless policy pursued by the provincial New Democratic Party (NDP) government, Lily has become a vocal advocate for the closure of all schools to bring the pandemic under control and save lives.

“We have not been one bit protected,” she told us, referring to the NDP government’s response to the pandemic. “I am so angry! Getting COVID-19 was the worst experience of my life.

“It makes me so livid! They said schools are safe. They said kids cannot get it. Liars! They don’t care about the amount of deaths and sickness they are causing. They are to blame for not closing the schools and businesses.”

Describing her own experience, Lily explained how she was largely left to fend for herself. “I have two boys. The six year old is in a Grade 1 class, and the seven year old is in a Grade 2 class in a public school,” she said. “In January, we were all feeling tired. The kids were grumpy and irritable. Being a single parent I can’t afford a car. One day I went to get the boys at school, and another parent offered me a ride home. I was grateful for the ride.

“That night, the school emailed out a ‘notice of exposure’—there was COVID in the school. We were not told anything specific. I emailed the principal: Should I send them to school, is it a good idea? She said I should if they are not showing symptoms. So they went for the rest of the week. I do not blame her. She is in the same boat as me, and Public Health said it

was safe. Public Health did not contact me for four days to tell me I was a close contact of someone with COVID-19. I was not even isolated! I went about my business as usual. I took the bus. Who knows how many I infected? Contact tracing is a joke.

“We were not given any details. So I called another mom. She told me her son’s class was isolated too. She had driven to get a COVID test, and it was positive. I could not believe it. I told her I had a behavioral interventionist appointment for my child at my house. The woman put on masks and came in. She took all precautions as put forth by Public Health, but due to the lag in reporting we were unaware that we had to isolate until after the appointment. And by the time we received notice from the school and Public Health, we had exposed her. At 9:30 p.m. Friday, my six year old’s whole class was finally told to self-isolate.

“I called Public Health to say we were sick and asked for them to come and test us. They refused and told me to take transit or a taxi to get tested. They suggested I isolate the seven year old from the six year old, but how does a single mother do that? By Sunday I was unable to smell or taste anything. I called my friends and family in Ontario. I could not feel my face. My sons were vomiting. I was worried that I would die at one point.”

Lily’s kids returned to school in February. “I only sent my kids to school 14 days, not consecutive days either, during the whole semester, but unfortunately they kept being exposed to COVID,” she continued. “My seven year old was exposed in school so we spent from February 20 to March 8 self-isolating. On March 12, I sent them back to school after the Family Day long weekend. My other son got exposed again after

three days of being back, and we had to isolate again. I was by now worn down with fatigue.

“Although I am very poor, after the third isolation I hired a babysitter for an hour a day to pick the boys up after school and walk them home because I was just too weak to do it. It was the Easter weekend. On the Monday I had to take my six year old to the doctor, and I emailed the babysitter to only pick up my seven year old. The school called and said there was no one to pick him up. I had to go. I kept emailing the babysitter. On the Friday, she finally messaged me that she had COVID and said, ‘Public Health will call you,’ but they never did.”

Months after Lily’s illness, her family is still struggling with the impact of the infection. “I still have symptoms,” she said. “I am told I have what they call ‘long COVID.’”

The consequences for her kids also concern her. “I worry about how the situation will affect them emotionally,” she said. “It was so scary for all of us. They are always tired and cranky. My seven year old asked me if I heard that ringing—he seems to hear ringing in his ears. What other health conditions will we face because of this? Small children cannot express how they feel. They just cry or say they are dizzy.”

Lily also discussed how difficult it is to raise a family in Vancouver, where the cost of rent is among the highest in any city in the world. “I cannot afford to order groceries online,” she said. “I have to check my bank balance every day. I cannot afford a taxi, and I am scared of the bus. Plus, I have to take my kids with me, unless they are in school.

“The amount of support they gave workers on the CERB (Canada Emergency Response Benefit), \$2,000 a month, was a joke. And it is cruel that the disabled are made to live on about \$1,600 a month, all the time. Vancouver is one of the most expensive cities. I have not been able to work for the past seven years. My husband left me when I was pregnant the second time, and I had a one year old. We lived for years in a one-bedroom flat because that is all I can afford.”

Lily believes that the open economy/open schools policy serves the interests of the rich, and that none of the established political parties represents her interests. “The poor have to go out to work and to school, to get the bus,” she told us. “Parents suffer because kids exposed at school bring home the virus and get whole

households sick. That is why people should have been advocating for school closures from the beginning.

“The 29-39 year old age group is all getting P1 [the more contagious Brazilian variant] now because we have kids at school. The kids go to school, pick it up and bring it home. The parents and whole family get sick. The school staff bring it home with them. We all spread it everywhere we shop. Schools are a vector for transmission—a superspreader event.”

While noting that “it is too late now to prevent my family being sick,” Lily firmly believes that the pandemic can be contained and thousands of lives saved. “The smart idea is to close schools until everyone is vaccinated,” she told us. “Closing all the schools is not going to be easy, but it is for the better good.

“I cannot understand people who do not want the schools shut down. A full closure would be brilliant. Why not take the opportunity to vaccinate everyone? So many people spewing misinformation: children cannot get it, and young people do not get it. But they do and they die from it.

“But they do not have to if we close the schools and compensate everyone to stay home and get the vaccine. Kids are still in schools right now for economic and political reasons. BC Public Health and the NDP government are indifferent. I cannot keep my kids safe, and neither can their teachers.

“The only way to make us all safe is to have the whole world vaccinated, including the kids. I support the Socialist Equality Party’s call for immediate school closures.”



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