

More reports surface of child deaths from COVID-19 in the US as students remain in classrooms

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Multiple reports have emerged over the past week about the deaths of children in the United States caused by COVID-19, providing further evidence that kids are vulnerable to fatal outcomes from the virus which has already killed more than 580,000 people in America alone.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, over 3.71 million children have tested positive for COVID-19 since the onset of the pandemic last year. Deaths among children are rising against the backdrop of the deadly reopening of public schools and the spread of more contagious variants of the virus.

One of the recent children to succumb to the disease was a first grader, 6-year-old Week Day from Marshall, Minnesota, who passed away on Sunday. She reportedly contracted the virus without having any underlying health conditions. The Minnesota Department of Health identified Day as a student at Park Side Elementary. Day's death has coincided with a worrisome increase in cases and hospitalizations of children from the virus in the state.

A letter was sent out to parents at the school alerting them of the child's passing as a result of complications from coronavirus. One parent, Cecilia Alvarez, told local news outlet KVOA that she was "immediately heartbroken for the parents and the family," sharing her sympathy as a parent of a young daughter herself. She also questioned the push to reopen schools and the abandonment of distance learning. "Education is, of course, important, but their lives are more important," Alvarez said. "You don't get them back; you don't get a do-over."

Alex Hernandez, a 14-year-old boy from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, died of COVID-19 complications in early April. His was the first reported pediatric death caused by the virus in the state. Hernandez had first tested positive for the virus last November. Officials indicated that the boy's infection remained active before he tested positive again on March 27. He passed away on April 1.

A third child, an unidentified 11-year-old boy who traveled to Hawaii earlier this week, died on Tuesday from COVID-19. His parents had been fully vaccinated and tested for the virus before arriving in the state on vacation but vaccines have yet to be approved for use in children.

The child's death came as a shock, as health officials say he started experiencing COVID-19 symptoms within hours after landing in the islands before being rushed to the hospital. The boy is only the 479th reported fatality in Hawaii and the first

coronavirus-related death of a person in that age range in the state.

While the precise circumstances surrounding the deaths of younger children are often not made public due to privacy concerns, each tragedy should be seen within the context of the ruling elites' homicidal "herd immunity" approach to the pandemic nationwide—which has resulted in more than 33 million infections—and the advent of new and even more deadly variants that are proving to pose a far greater danger to younger people. Outbreaks of the variants are being driven principally by the reckless reopening of in-person learning, which is placing millions of children and educators' lives at risk.

The community where Day lived, Marshall, had reopened classrooms since the beginning of the semester under the "hybrid" model, which allowed all K-4 students to attend schools onsite for four days per week, with just one day of distance learning. According to Marshall School District officials, Park Side Elementary has seen 22 students and staff go into quarantine since the semester started. Dr. Brooke Moore, a pediatric pulmonologist for Children's Minnesota Hospital, told KVOA that while most children who get COVID-19 will be asymptomatic, around 10 percent of cases in children are severe.

In comments to the media following the death of Day, Superintendent Jeremy Williams declared the district would merely continue following Minnesota Department of Health guidelines and no changes would be implemented for the school's hybrid and in-person reopening policies. He noted the district's supposed ongoing efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and simply told parents that they should watch their children for symptoms and get them tested.

This stance has been the policy for the greater portion of school districts, large and small, for most of the pandemic's duration, ultimately placing responsibility on parents for students being infected, and not the irrational drive to reopen schools.

This nationwide campaign has been intensified since the beginning of the spring semester, as media commentators and school administrators have repeated ad nauseam the unconcerned and unscientific talking points of politicians from the corporate-controlled Democratic and Republican parties, claiming that deaths among children from COVID-19 are rare and should therefore not deter officials from filling classrooms.

Superintendent Williams expressed this view in his perfunctory

message to parents after Day's death. Before admitting that the danger of children dying from the virus was "scary and concerning for many," he said the district would merely enlist "crisis team members ... to support all those in need," instead of calling for the shutdown of schools and a wholesale return to distance learning until the virus is suppressed. These comments reflect President Joe Biden's marching orders aimed at opening the majority of K-8 schools by the first 100 days of his administration.

Democratic Minnesota Governor Tim Walz said in a statement that it was "simply heartbreaking to hear that COVID-19 has taken the life of someone so young," and that "there is no grief more profound than the loss of family." Such comments amount to very little coming from the same governor who told the media in February, "It's time to get our students back in school" and patted himself on the back by saying, "We're on our way to ending the pandemic. We're beating this thing."

Biden and the Democrats have sought to couch their murderous plans in the most benevolent terms, with the president claiming that reopenings would coincide with providing "help" and "giving students extra support." This policy has meant the continued sacrifice of the health and lives of children, educators and staff members to the profit-interests of the super-rich and the capitalist system. To the ruling class and their flunkies in both capitalist parties, more students need to be pushed back into unsafe schools to ensure that parents can go back into unsafe factories and workplaces and continue pumping out wealth for big business and the financial elite.

The consequences of these policies are being borne out all across the country, where cities and entire states are witnessing an alarming spike in COVID-19 infections among children and young adults as a result of novel strains of COVID-19. In Michigan, which has gone full speed ahead with its reopening drive, there has been a record-breaking spike in child hospitalizations in recent weeks. Last week, Michigan's Health & Hospital Association released data showing children hospitalized with severe COVID-19 symptoms across the state had increased to 70, twice as many as were hospitalized during the second wave of the pandemic in November.

Public health officials across the country are increasingly turning their attention to developments in Michigan, citing the growing predominance of the B.1.1.7 variant as the source behind the latest wave. Health scientists are highlighting the situation in Michigan as a precursor for what could manifest in the majority of the United States once the new variant makes deep inroads in communities throughout the country.

In an interview with WebMD in early April, Minnesota state epidemiologist Ruth Lynfield pointed to the rapidly rising infection rate in the state and mentioned how the B.1.1.7 variant has a higher attack rate among children than earlier versions of the virus, causing a far higher likelihood for infection when exposed. Lynfield said health officials are vigorously tracking cases that are emerging primarily through non-essential workplaces and spaces, such as youth sports leagues, classrooms and day care centers. "We certainly get the sense that youth are what we might refer to as the leading edge of the spread of variants," she said.

In Massachusetts, the largest number of new COVID-19

infections since the start of April have been among children and teenagers. The state also has the fifth highest number of B.1.1.7 cases in the US, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Cases have been especially severe for youth with underlying medical conditions. But even among healthier children, the virus has been known to trigger a far more serious post-viral syndrome called MIS-C, which has led to more hospitalizations for small children in many parts of the country.

While children only represent a fraction of deaths from COVID-19 infections, statistics recently have confirmed that children now comprise a larger percentage of people getting infected than earlier in the pandemic. An American Academy of Pediatrics report showed that children accounted for one in five cases detected nationwide during the second week of April. In Michigan, for example, rates of child infections are now higher than at any point in the pandemic. As late as April 17, children aged 10-19 were averaging more than 1,150 cases per day during the previous week, the state's highest rate of new cases. For children younger than 10, the average was 400 new cases per day.

In contrast to the complacency shown by public officials toward the relatively low rate of fatality among children from the virus, the number of child deaths has reached tragic levels. According to the Covid Project, which tracks child deaths from COVID-19 using government reports and news accounts, there were 582 child deaths as of late March. This makes the disease one of the top 10 causes of death for children in the US. It's also worth noting that this number was recorded before the explosion of infections from the new B.1.1.7 variant that was seen in April.

Scientists have also recently noted that while children may have a lower risk of developing severe COVID-19 than adults, many children have already become "long haulers" of the disease and are experiencing symptoms months after they first contracted the virus. In the United States, very limited data has been collected to gauge how common this phenomenon is among school children under 18, mostly due to intransigence on the part of public officials that no information be released that counters the unsafe reopening drive.

But in other places, such as the United Kingdom, recent data has shown that 10 to 15 percent of children younger than 16 infected with COVID-19 still had at least one symptom five weeks later. A research study from the Department of Woman and Child Health at Fondazione Policlinico Universitario A. Gemelli in Rome, Italy, also came to similar conclusions after analyzing a cohort of 129 children diagnosed with COVID-19 between March and November 2020. Of these, more than half (52.7 percent) reported experiencing at least one symptom of COVID-19 approximately four months after the initial diagnosis.



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