

New study doubles global COVID-19 death toll

Bryan Dyne
7 May 2021

The number of global COVID-19 deaths is twice as high as officially reported—6.93 million globally, 905,000 in the United States alone—according to a new study by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME).

These new figures were reported Thursday in an analysis of “excess mortality” by the IHME. Importantly, the study includes only under-reported deaths from COVID-19, and excludes deaths from other causes related to the pandemic—including delayed medical care and “deaths of despair” such as suicides or overdoses, related to the social crisis triggered by the pandemic.

The research presents a disastrous picture of the toll of the pandemic and is an indictment of the capitalist order that has allowed death on this scale to occur. If, in the words of the British medical journal *BMJ*, nearly 3.3 million deaths are “social murder,” what does the doubling of this death toll signify?

By any measure, this is the largest public health disaster ever in the United States. 905,000 deaths are greater than all the combat and non-combat deaths in the American Civil War, the nation’s bloodiest conflict. 905,000 deaths represent one in every 367 men, women, and children in the US. 905,000 deaths are more than *double* the combined combat fatalities of all US wars fought since the Spanish-American War in 1898, including World War I, World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War.

Almost equally astounding is that the new estimates have gone essentially unreported in the media. The IHME has been used as the semi-official coronavirus case and death count prediction team for more than a year, referred to multiple times by the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and numerous others.

But no matter the efforts by the media to bury this report, such a colossal loss of life has the most far-reaching implications. It is a brutal indictment of the American ruling elite and the capitalist governments of the entire world.

Such mass death was not an accident, but the product of deliberate policy. The world’s ruling elite was well aware of the threat posed by the virus, but refused to raise the alarm. While then-US President Donald Trump sought to “play down” the virus, despite being aware that “[t]his is deadly stuff,” Congress and the media received numerous briefings and interviews about the scale of the looming disaster.

Yet no alarms were raised either by the White House or the media until March. Instead, plans were developed to protect the world’s markets, not human lives. In the United States and Europe, trillions of dollars and euros were pumped into financial markets, while virtually nothing was being devoted towards minimizing the impact of the pandemic, which at that point had already claimed tens of thousands of lives.

Instead of suppressing the pandemic, the ruling classes promoted the policy of “herd immunity”—the claim it would be better for society to just let the disease spread uncontrolled.

This policy was voiced publicly in Britain on March 14, when the government’s chief scientific advisor Sir Patrick Vallance stood next to Prime Minister Boris Johnson and declared that it “isn’t desirable” to “stop everyone getting” the coronavirus. This policy was made even more explicit over the summer, when Trump administration advisor Paul Elias Alexander said on July 4 that, “Infants, kids, teens, young people, young adults, middle aged with no conditions etc. have zero to little risk... so we use them to develop herd... we want them infected.”

The policy of herd immunity was further developed specifically in relationship to children in Sweden by state epidemiologist Anders Tegnell, who in an email also on March 14 stated that, “One point might speak for keeping schools open in order to reach herd immunity more quickly.”

Once the various bailouts were secured, there was a

definite shift in the tone of world governments to immediately end lockdowns, particularly those of March and April 2020 that were triggered by numerous wildcat strikes against unsafe working conditions. Chief among the reopening calls were from the Trump administration, asserting that “the cure can’t be worse than the disease.”

Outcries from workers and medical experts against this homicidal policy were met with contempt. Brazil’s president, Jair Bolsonaro, declared on April 8, “It’s raining. We’re going to get wet. And some are going to drown in the rain.” German parliament president Wolfgang Schäuble said similarly on April 26, “But when I hear that everything must take second place to the protection of life, then I must say: that is not right in such an absolute sense.”

This outlook was epitomized by the recently reported outburst by Boris Johnson, which occurred on October 30 when he demanded, “No more f***ing lockdowns, let the bodies pile high in their thousands!”

More than a year later, the human tragedy caused by the “malign neglect” of the world’s governments toward the working class is clear in a figure that is worth repeating: an estimated 6.93 million men, women and children dead in little more than year to a deadly but preventable disease.

Now, under Joe Biden, schools are reopening across the country, threatening a major resurgence of the disease nationally. Biden himself declared on January 22, 2021, that, “There’s nothing we can do to change the trajectory of the pandemic in the next several months,” categorically ruling out lockdowns while sending students, teachers and staff back into disease-infested buildings. The result was a predictable rise in cases in Michigan, Florida, Pennsylvania, Illinois and elsewhere.

Now, mask mandates and social distancing measures are being wholly abandoned throughout the United States. Workers in the US are being told what the French working class was told by French President Emanuel Macron on February 2: “We are going to live with the virus.”

The dangers of such an outlook cannot be overstated. Already, the pandemic has entered a new stage, of rampaging through the equatorial regions and global south. The disaster in India is the worst of numerous emerging surges of the pandemic, where the IHME estimates more than 654,000 dead, compared to the official count of 238,000, and predicts a further 1 million dead by September.

In a nationally televised address delivered on April 21,

2021, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi made clear that future lockdowns to prevent such a colossal scale of death are out of the question. He declared, “In today’s situation, we have to save the country from lockdown.” In other words, the economic interests of the financial oligarchy must be “saved” no matter how many lives are lost.

Such callous disregard for human life does not merely threaten every worker in India, it threatens the working class the world over. As has been shown by the emergence of new variants in the past six months, the coronavirus is extremely capable of mutating into new and more infectious forms, as demonstrated by the variants first detected in Brazil, Britain and India, which are suspected to be the drivers of the recent surges in cases and deaths in the respective countries.

Moreover, even if the virus is stopped in the United States, for example, the variants spreading in India or Brazil or elsewhere could absolutely wrap around and reinfect the US, including with mutations that allow the virus to evade immunity. By its very nature, a pandemic is a global phenomenon and can only be resolved with a genuinely international response.

Such a response, however, will not come from the existing ruling classes. Trump, Johnson, Bolsonaro, Macron, Modi, Biden and their ilk are all responsible for “social murder” on a scale not seen since the world wars and they will not change course. It will only be the working class itself, mobilized in a political struggle against the capitalist profit motive which all these figures defend, that will hold these criminals to account for the mass death and suffering they have inflicted on the world’s population.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact