

US media seize on Pfizer vaccine authorization for children to fully reopen schools

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On Monday, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) granted emergency use authorization (EUA) to the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for 12- to 15-year-olds in the United States. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is expected soon to grant similar authorization, which would allow vaccinations for this age group to begin immediately. President Joe Biden recently stated that roughly 20,000 pharmacies are prepared to administer the vaccine to adolescents.

The authorization follows the release of initial results from an ongoing clinical trial by Pfizer-BioNTech, which involves 2,260 participants ages 12-15. The results found 18 cases of symptomatic coronavirus infections in the placebo group and none among the group that received the vaccine. On this basis, the companies have claimed that the vaccine is 100 percent effective in preventing COVID-19. Side effects from the vaccine were comparable to those seen in older age groups.

The initial results of the ongoing clinical trial and the granting of EUA to the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine have been seized upon by the corporate media to press for the rapid vaccination of this age group in order to fully reopen schools and “return to normalcy,” in the words of the *New York Times*. As has been the case throughout the pandemic, there are substantial economic motives involved in this campaign, whose fundamental aim is to ensure that all parents are able to return to workplaces as quickly as possible to maximize the production of corporate profits.

In its print edition, the *Times* ran a front-page article Tuesday announcing the authorization, with the subheading: “Widespread inoculations may speed a return to classrooms.” Author Apoorva Mandavilli wrote that the authorization “removes an obstacle to school reopenings by reducing the threat of transmission in classrooms.”

On Sunday, a day before the FDA’s announcement, the *Times* ran a separate piece by education writer Dana Goldstein titled, “Schools Are Open, but Many Families

Remain Hesitant to Return.” The article bemoans the fact that while only 12 percent of elementary and middle schools remain fully online, “the percentage of students learning fully remotely is much greater: more than a third of fourth and eighth graders, and an even larger group of high school students.”

Inventing a term out of whole cloth and without citing any scientists, Goldstein writes, “Experts have coined the term ‘school hesitancy’ to describe the remarkably durable resistance to a return to traditional learning.” She claims that these unnamed “experts”—in reality, the financial oligarchy for whom the *Times* speaks—“see the phenomenon as a social and educational crisis for children that must be combated—a challenge akin to vaccine hesitancy.”

Throughout the past year, Goldstein and the *Times* have been among the foremost advocates of school reopenings, in the process distorting science, vilifying teachers and elevating right-wing pro-reopening parents.

As part of the campaign to rapidly vaccinate children in order to fully reopen schools, the print and broadcast news media is belatedly acknowledging that children can become infected and die from COVID-19, develop multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C) and readily transmit the virus to their parents. These facts—proven by multiple studies since last summer—have been downplayed by the entire corporate media and political establishment as tens of millions of children were herded into unsafe classrooms. The studies and their findings have been reported extensively only by the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Just as the media has barely reported recent estimates that over 900,000 people have died from COVID-19 in the US and nearly 7 million worldwide, not a single outlet has reported the CDC’s own estimates that nearly 26.7 million children under 18 have been infected with COVID-19. This amounts to more than a third of the total US population in that age group, 74.2 million children. According to the CDC, 3,185 children have been diagnosed with MIS-C and 36

have died, both of which are also surely underestimates.

Recent studies have shown that roughly 10-15 percent of all children infected with COVID-19 develop long-term complications, known as “Long COVID,” including sleep disorders, heart palpitations, gastrointestinal issues, breathing difficulties, muscle and joint pain, headaches, cognitive impairment, lack of concentration and other debilitating symptoms. Using the CDC’s estimate of 26.7 million child infections, up to 4 million children may already be suffering from Long COVID in the US alone.

The deliberate distortion of science and downplaying of the risks posed to children over the past year constitute a conspiracy orchestrated by the entire political establishment, the corporate media and the teachers unions. This began last summer under the Trump administration, with adviser Paul Elias Alexander writing in a July 4 email, “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 school reopening campaign has been intensified under Biden. In February, the newly inaugurated president lied directly to a second-grade student at a CNN town hall event, stating, “Kids don’t get ... COVID very often. It’s unusual for that to happen.” Just last week, he reiterated this lie in an NBC News interview, saying, “There’s not overwhelming evidence that there’s much of a transmission among these people, young people.” He concluded, “Based on the science and the CDC, [schools] should probably all be open.”

Throughout the pandemic, the federal government has refused to implement national surveillance testing of children or any other section of the population. The only database tracking COVID-19 outbreaks at schools was “The COVID Monitor,” established by Florida whistleblower Rebekah Jones. After logging 762,259 infections tied to K-12 schools, the website now states that it “was decommissioned on March 1, 2021, after the Biden administration began an effort to overtake our responsibilities.” This was evidently premature, as the White House has yet to set up any comparable tracking system for schools.

In the school reopening drive, the teachers unions have played the most pivotal role. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT), National Education Association (NEA) and all of their state and local affiliates have suppressed the enormous opposition among educators to the reckless reopening of schools, isolating every strike and protest that has broken out over the past year. It was recently revealed that the AFT directly influenced the CDC’s unscientific update of its school reopening guidelines in February, calling for schools to open “at any level of community transmission.” This set the stage for every major district in

the US to resume in-person learning.

Throughout the pandemic, children, educators, parents and all of society have been endangered by the powers-that-be. For the political establishment and media, the push to quickly vaccinate adolescents is motivated not by public health concerns, but rather by the profit interests of the corporate-financial oligarchy which they serve.

The initial clinical trial results for the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine among adolescents appear promising. However, the approval process must not be allowed to be rushed or politically driven. Moreover, the vaccines must not be viewed as a magic bullet to end the pandemic in a given country, which is scientifically impossible.

Underscoring the global character of the pandemic, on the same day that the Food and Drug Administration granted EUA status to the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, the World Health Organization (WHO) classified the highly contagious triple-mutant B.1.617 variant spreading in India as a “variant of concern,” indicating that it poses a major health threat globally. As long as the virus spreads unchecked in any part of the world, the danger will grow that the existing vaccines will lose their efficacy, creating conditions where the pandemic can become endemic and tens of millions more could die worldwide.

What is required is a globally coordinated program to fully contain the pandemic. This includes the immediate closure of all schools and nonessential workplaces on a world scale, combined with the provision of ample economic resources for all workers and families affected, as well as universal testing, contact tracing and the safe isolation of all infected patients. Intellectual property rights must be abolished and a global production and distribution system rapidly established to safely vaccinate the world population.

Over the past year, educators and other workers across the US and internationally have formed rank-and-file committees independent of the capitalist parties and the official trade unions, which serve as their enforcers, in order to advance this scientifically grounded program. These efforts must be expanded into every workplace and industry in every country, unified through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, to prosecute the class struggle and implement the measures necessary to contain the pandemic and save lives.



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