

End of CDC masking guidelines aimed at “normalizing” death

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14 May 2021

On Thursday, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced that it is no longer advising that individuals vaccinated against COVID-19 wear masks indoors or socially distance.

“Anyone who is fully vaccinated can participate in indoor and outdoor activities, large or small, without wearing a mask or physical distancing,” CDC Director Rochelle Walensky declared.

But with nearly two thirds of the American population not fully vaccinated, there is no effective way to determine who is vaccinated and who is not. The change in the CDC’s guidelines will mean that all people, whether vaccinated or unvaccinated, will be allowed to gather indoors, including at mass events like sporting events, without masks. The result will be a significant increase in the rate at which the disease spreads.

The CDC’s guidance is a political, not a scientific, decision. It is intended as a signal that all measures that impinge on business interests, from social distancing requirements to enhanced sanitary guidelines, are to be dropped. Factories and workplaces will be free to bunch workers up in groups, never clean surfaces or bathrooms, and send their employees into unmasked crowds.

Within 24 hours, several of the country’s largest retailers, including Walmart, Sam’s Club and Trader Joe’s, announced that they would no longer be enforcing mask mandates. More than 10 states, including Kansas and Minnesota, loosened mask restrictions in response to the CDC’s new guidelines.

The announcement came as a shock to epidemiologists. Following the release of the guidelines, the *New York Times* published an article entitled “Hundreds of Epidemiologists Expected Mask-Wearing in Public for at Least a Year.” In a survey of

epidemiologists carried out in the month before the announcement, the *Times* found that “80 percent said they thought Americans would need to wear masks in public indoor places for at least another year. Just five percent said people would no longer need to wear masks indoors by this summer.”

“Unless the vaccination rates increase to 80 or 90 percent over the next few months, we should wear masks in large public indoor settings,” Vivian Towe, a program officer at the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute, told the *New York Times*.

Commenting on the CDC proposal, Eric Feigl-Ding, Chief Health Economist for Microclinic International and senior fellow at the Federation of American Scientists, commented “KEEP WEARING THE MASK—We card-carrying epidemiologists (with formal doctorate in epidemiology) know what we are talking about.”

He added in a subsequent tweet, “you cannot distinguish who took off the mask after fully vaccinated versus who took it off / never wore it despite being not vaccinated.”

While vaccination is critical to containing and eradicating COVID-19, it is only partially effective. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines claim to be 95 percent effective, meaning that one in twenty infections will still take place among vaccinated people.

The Johnson & Johnson vaccine is even less effective, with one study showing it was only 66 percent effective at blocking moderate to severe COVID-19. This reality was driven home when eight members of the New York Yankees baseball team and their managerial staff tested positive for COVID-19 in recent days, despite being fully vaccinated with the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

From the beginning of the pandemic, the ruling class

in the US and internationally responded by rejecting all necessary measures to save lives. The consequences have been catastrophic. The global death toll stands at more than 3.3 million. Daily new cases and daily deaths worldwide are near or at record levels.

In the United States, according to official figures, nearly 600,000 people have died from the COVID-19 pandemic. A recent study by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation estimated that the actual death toll is over 900,000—a figure greater than any war in US history.

Now, even the pretense that the disease is being combatted is being dropped. Instead of claiming to be stopping the spread of the disease, mass death from COVID-19 is being “normalized.” The pandemic will continue. New strains will spread, and workers are being told that they will simply have to accept widespread death as a fact of life.

In December 2020, when the US death toll stood at nearly 300,000, the WSWS explained:

The normalization of death arises from the decision, rooted in class interests, to treat “economic health” and “human life” as comparable phenomena, with the former prioritized over the latter. Once the legitimacy of the comparison and prioritization is accepted—as it is by the political establishment, the oligarchs and the media—mass death is viewed as unavoidable. It is from this awful calculus that the slogan emerges, “The cure can’t be worse than the disease.”

In the past five months, the death toll has doubled. A new administration has taken power, but the same policy continues. As part of this campaign, the number of daily deaths and infections in the US is not even being reported in news reports. However, the US death toll remains between 600 and 700 a day. Over 20,000 people died of COVID-19 over the past 30 days, and 868 people died of the disease on Wednesday alone. At this time last year, there were 24,000 daily new cases of COVID-19, compared to 40,000 today.

The end of mask mandates will eliminate another obstacle to the spread of COVID-19 variants, which are

potentially more resistant to the immunity provided by vaccines and natural infection. Every day, more than 700,000 people around the world test positive for COVID-19, giving the virus more opportunities to mutate as it spreads. The potential risks of new variants of COVID-19 are unknowable and unknown.

The change in CDC guidelines has no scientific or public health validity. The Trump administration repeatedly pressured the CDC to falsify science to justify the administration’s goal of reopening schools and business. This reality has not changed under Biden, who has dedicated his administration to the single-minded pursuit of reopening schools, with the aim of getting the largest possible share of the population back into the labor force to swell the profits of major corporations and hold down rising demands by workers for wage increases.

Workers must not accept the CDC’s politically motivated guidance. They must demand that all those entering their workforce be masked, and that management allocate the necessary resources for the enforcement of strict hygiene protocols to stop the spread of COVID-19.

The fight for these demands is impossible within the framework of the trade unions. The same day as the CDC’s politically motivated guidance, American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten expressed her determination to break the resistance of teachers to the reopening of schools, declaring, “There is no doubt: Schools must be open. In person. Five days a week.”

Workers cannot accept that tens of thousands of people will die every month in the United States, together with hundreds of thousands around the world. The struggle to contain the pandemic is inseparable from the creation of rank-and-file committees in every workplace, and the fight to arm the working class with a socialist perspective to overthrow the capitalist system that subordinates the preservation of human life to private profit.



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