

Amid warnings of “catastrophic” COVID-19 third wave, Brazil’s state governors reopen economy

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As deaths decrease in the immediate aftermath of April’s second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil, the number of new cases is already rising again since the beginning of May. The rolling average of new daily cases has increased from 56,533 on April 26 to 64,665 on May 19, well on its way to reaching the levels of the March surge that resulted in a historically unprecedented population decrease in April in many states, including heavily populated states in the south and southeast, as a direct result of COVID-19 deaths.

Since April, the death toll has been decreasing, dropping to 1,901 on May 17. However, since March, both the death toll and the number of new cases have remained above the scale of the first wave of May-August of last year. A May 13 report from the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz) pointed out that “The continuing high level observed, despite the slight reduction in the severity indicators, demands that all safety measures be maintained because a third wave now, with such high rates, could represent an even graver health crisis.”

Brazil has registered a total of more than 15,800,000 cases and 440,000 deaths so far, ranking as the second country with most deaths for more than a year before India’s current deadly surge saw it surpass fatalities in both Brazil and the US on Thursday.

Fiocruz warned that a new surge, given the current scenario of high incidence rates, “will be catastrophic.” It will also present an “opportunity for the emergence of new variants of the virus due to the intensity of transmission, as we have seen in other regions and countries.”

These warnings have not stopped the drive to reopen the economies of every state in Brazil, covered up by lying claims that the stabilization of cases means that the pandemic is “under control.”

Since April 18, right-wing Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB) São Paulo state Governor João Doria has announced “transition phase” measures, reopening the

economy, based on a small decrease in ICU occupancy rates, going from more than 90 percent in April to 79 percent this week.

The current number of occupied ICUs in São Paulo is above 10,000, much worse than during the first wave, when it reached a peak of 6,500. There are currently seven states with ICU beds filled to over 90 percent, and seven others reporting rates above 80 percent.

During a press conference Wednesday, Doria’s Health Secretary Jean Gorinchteyn declared that the increase in infirmary occupation rates confirmed the effectiveness of vaccination efforts, “increasing the number of patients with light symptoms,” while the growing number of new cases in the state was the result of “an increase in testing.”

On Wednesday, Doria declared a new stage in the reopening of the economy, increasing hours businesses are allowed to remain open, and raising the limit of people indoors to 60 percent, starting on June 1. Since April, during the second wave, state governments throughout the country started reopening their economies, including in states governed by the Workers Party (PT).

In Ceará, where PT Governor Camilo Santana reopened businesses and schools for small children in April, the number of new cases has increased for the past three consecutive weeks. The state’s ICUs are currently 93 percent occupied. This did not stop the state’s health secretary from declaring this week that “transmission rates are already stabilizing.”

Meanwhile, the grave risks posed by the stabilization in the number of new cases are being covered up by the mainstream media, which is promoting the provision of small batches of vaccines as a major advance in the fight against the pandemic while at the same time reporting on the weekly changes in opening hours of stores, restaurants and gyms, along with the reopening of schools. The latest achievement, representing full vaccination for four percent of the population, was announced with relief by the media

on Monday, amid reports of a full stoppage of vaccine distribution due to shortages throughout the country.

The efforts by governments and the media are aimed at staving off a wave of opposition in Brazil, as the slow pace of immunization amid high levels of new coronavirus cases is creating the conditions for an explosion of popular anger over the pandemic policies of the ruling class. They clearly foresee the danger that the mass demonstrations that have rocked Colombia for more than a week will spread to Brazil and throughout the region.

The attempts to promote the vaccination efforts as the only effective response to the pandemic were exposed by a recent study published as a pre-print article on May 12. The study estimates that 16.9 percent of all Manaus infections by the Brazilian variant P.1 in 2021 were, in fact, reinfections, illustrating the effects of letting the virus spread through the population without social distancing or contact tracing measures.

In a recent interview, Dimas Covas, the São Paulo state government Coronavirus Contingency Center interim chief and president of the Butantan Institute, one of the two facilities producing vaccines in the country, declared that an effective vaccination campaign would only become a reality by September or October. In March, federal Health Minister Marcelo Queiroga postponed the end date for restricting full vaccination to health workers, the elderly and other priority groups from April to September.

The efforts of Fiocruz, one of the vaccine production centers, have faced consecutive setbacks, mainly due to delays in imports of materials necessary for production. Such delays occur while the efforts of global immunization are disrupted by the competition of all major capitalist powers, refusing to lift patents for vaccines and blocking vaccine materials from being exported.

Moreover, attempts by the mainstream media to promote themselves as defenders of the use of masks are belied by reports about the new CDC guidelines allowing for the end of mask and social distancing mandates in the US. A report by *Estado de São Paulo* on the new guidelines echoed the Biden administration's propaganda campaign, stating, "The measure tries to offer guarantees that some semblance of normal life can come back" and adding, "The new orientation comes while half of American adults have already received at least one vaccine shot against COVID-19, according to the CDC."

The unscientific idea that mask mandates can be relaxed after half the population gets one shot is in fact a program of mass infection, being supported by *Estado* and the corporate interests which the newspaper represents.

Last month, *Folha de São Paulo* published an article making the bogus claim that the reopening of schools had no

effect on new cases in the largest school district in the country. One of the authors, João Paulo Cossi Fernandes, worked at the Lemann Foundation during 2016-2017.

The foundation is one of the major education NGOs and think tanks that worked alongside the government in pushing through national educational "reform" in 2017, which resulted in the further worsening of working conditions for teachers and is set to end night classes by 2022, spelling the exclusion of millions of students who have to work during the day.

Since last year, the foundation dedicated itself to promoting the return to schools, in tandem with state governments throughout the country, using the false claim that children are not significant vectors of transmission for the coronavirus.

That the coronavirus cannot be put under control in one state or country without a global coordinated response is again being shown by the deadly toll of the pandemic in India and its neighboring countries. This week, the southern-most states of Brazil were put on alert for new cases after the appearance of the Indian variant in Argentina. Moreover, the May 13 Fiocruz report declared four Brazilian states were already showing a tendency of increase in new cases, posing the risk of a third wave that could spread out of control throughout the region.

The criminal response to the pandemic by the government, based on the profit interests of banks and corporations, must be met with an organized struggle by the working class in Brazil and internationally.

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) is proposing the formation of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) as a coordinated global response of the working class to the global pandemic. This must be part of the fight to overthrow the capitalist system, which is unable to produce a rational, humane response to the pandemic and to build a socialist society, that is, a society based on human need.



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