

Reject the CDC's change to masking guidelines!

West Coast Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees
23 May 2021

The West Coast Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees condemn the recent change in guidelines by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which loosen mask requirements and social distancing recommendations for vaccinated individuals. This anti-scientific and politically motivated move will lead to further unnecessary infections and deaths. The announcement is a clear indication that the CDC as well as the Biden administration seek to normalize death in the interests of reopening the economy.

The continued catastrophic global conditions of the pandemic make clear that COVID-19 cannot be brought under control in one state or country but requires a global coordinated effort.

Daily new infections on a world scale are at yet another high point. More dangerous variants of the coronavirus are rapidly spreading in countries such as India and Brazil, affecting people of all age groups. Significantly, doctors treating patients in India and Singapore have noted that the new B.1.617 and B.1.617.2 variants have caused cases among children to be more frequent and more severe.

Too many people around the world are still vulnerable to begin lifting restrictions. In the US, only 38 percent of the population has been vaccinated. Children under 12 years old, the vast majority of those attending in-person schools, are not vaccinated. Largely due to the reopening of schools in February through April, US daily new cases and deaths have declined at a snail's pace. Undoubtedly underreported, daily new cases in the US alone remain at roughly 30,000 infections, while roughly 600 people succumb to the virus each day.

The pandemic is far from over, but the response of major capitalist governments across the globe has been to continue to prioritize profits over human lives and escalate the drive to reopen nonessential workplaces and schools.

When the CDC abruptly changed its guidelines on May 13, major corporations—including Walmart, Sam's Club, Trader Joe's and many others—immediately lifted mask mandates in their stores across the US. In the subsequent week, Amazon and others have followed suit.

On the same day as the CDC announcement, American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten publicly demanded the full reopening of all US schools for daily in-person learning by this fall. She bluntly stated the purpose of this campaign, saying, "Parents rely on schools, not only to educate their kids, but so they can work."

Weingarten, along with the rest of the state and local teachers union bureaucracies, are entirely hostile to the interests of the workers they claim to represent. Over the past year, these organizations have allowed for educators and school workers to become infected en masse. The reopening of schools has also directly contributed to cases among children, with the CDC itself estimating that nearly 26.7 million children under 18 have been infected with COVID-19.

Across the US, states run by both Republicans and Democrats are now pressing to fully lift mask mandates, including in Texas, Iowa, South Carolina, Florida, New York, Michigan, Connecticut and elsewhere. Along the West Coast, Democratic Party-led states have all begun loosening mask restrictions and committed to fully reopening schools by the fall.

Washington Governor Jay Inslee adopted the CDC guidance for masking last week, lifting indoor masking restrictions for fully vaccinated people, with the exception of hospitals, schools and public transportation.

Oregon Governor Kate Brown has announced the state will also lift mask mandates for fully vaccinated people. For schools, mask restrictions for outdoor youth sports have been fully lifted. Additionally, mask restrictions have been lifted indoors for staff and student athletes who

are fully vaccinated. Brown said that in the coming months the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) will also update the state's policy "to lift most restrictions based on CDC guidance" for the 2021-22 school year.

California Governor Gavin Newsom has announced that mask guidelines will be lifted on June 15, along with other major restrictions, and the state's COVID-19 tier system for tracking transmission and determining reopening guidelines will be ended. Policies regarding mask mandates in schools are still to be determined.

The premature lifting of mask mandates and opening of schools under conditions in which the pandemic is far from over must be prevented! Leading US and international epidemiologists have condemned the recent announcement by the CDC, warning that this is premature and would lead to the ending of mask mandates nationwide, as is now transpiring.

In a recent *New York Times* survey, hundreds of epidemiologists expressed the scientific imperative to continue mask wearing in conjunction with other mitigation measures in order to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Multiple studies have shown that opening schools leads directly to a growth in cases and deaths in the broader community, including a recent study, which found that Texas school reopenings last August led to at least 43,000 additional cases and 800 additional deaths statewide in an eight-week period after schools began to reopen.

The reckless actions by state and federal governments to fully reopen the economy, carried out in coordination with the CDC and the trade unions, underscores the need for a scientifically-based program with which workers can organize and fight back.

In following the science, we continue to reiterate our demands that schools and nonessential workplaces remain closed until the pandemic is contained. Programs to provide universal testing, contact tracing and the safe isolation of infected patients must be rapidly built on a world scale. Financial assistance must be provided to all those who need to stay home during this necessary global lock-down, which could put an end to the pandemic in a matter of weeks.

The health and social crisis unfolding across the globe due to the pandemic make clear that there is no local solution to this world problem. Under such conditions, the West Coast Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees give our full support for the call by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) to build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File

Committees (IWA-RFC).

Internationally, capitalist governments' responses to the pandemic have wreaked havoc on the working class, leading to the eruption of mass opposition among workers worldwide.

Across the globe, health care workers are fighting back against the skyrocketing death toll. In the last two weeks, doctors have gone on strike in India, where at least 25 percent of junior doctors have been infected with COVID-19 and health care workers are crying out for gloves and basic PPE. In March, Amnesty International reported that at least 17,000 health care workers have perished across the globe. Nurses in Japan are fighting back against being deployed to the Summer Olympic Games as cases in many areas such as Osaka are reporting days' long waits for hospital beds.

A week ago, 30,000 New Zealand public sector nurses and health care assistants voted to strike over "horrific and unsafe staffing conditions." The week prior, 600 doctors in Israel went on a 24-hour strike in opposition to mass layoffs as the US-backed Israeli government rained airstrikes on Gaza. Already in a nightmare, doctors are caring for both COVID-19 patients and injured civilians in what has become an open war zone.

Teachers, health care workers and the entire working class have everywhere been treated as expendable, as all mitigation efforts are cast out. Under these conditions, the trade unions have done everything possible to smother opposition, push open classrooms, and accepted as good coin all the class-based policies that serve the interests of the financial elite, including the latest CDC guidelines.

Workers need new forms of organization. Only the building of independent rank-and-file committees of workers internationally can combat the policies of the ruling elite and the trade unions. To coordinate this struggle, we call on all educators and workers to join us in expanding the IWA-RFC.



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