

Crowds return to US stadiums, airports, in a series of super-spreader events

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More than 135,000 people packed into the grandstands of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Sunday, in the largest single crowd assembled in one place since the coronavirus pandemic began. Despite the false reassurances of the Biden administration and state governments, however, the crowds assembled at sporting events over the holiday weekend that traditionally marks the beginning of the American summer are likely to be so many superspreader events, triggering a further upsurge in the pandemic.

In the grossest of symbolic gestures, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and former chief of infectious diseases at Massachusetts General Hospital, threw out the ceremonial first pitch at the game at Saturday's baseball game in Fenway Park, Boston.

The state has rescinded its mask mandate and Republican Governor Charlie Baker declared, "the great majority of the state-mandated COVID-19 restrictions that have shaped life in Massachusetts since last March will no longer be in effect starting Saturday." The state ranks fourth, with 53.4 percent of the population fully vaccinated.

Baker added, "Unless something very odd happens, I would say that it is pretty much over." However, health officials are raising concerns that across many states, vaccinations are slowing drastically, and death and infection tolls remain unacceptably high in many states.

Dr. Walensky, at the helm of the national public health agency, has been instrumental in rapidly navigating the country back to "normalcy," all while the pandemic has continued to kill more than 500 people per day indiscriminately. In her usual attempt to talk out of both sides of her mouth, she told reporters, "I'm cautiously optimistic, and yet, I'm not declaring victory. What I would say is we in America are doing better than we had been, for sure, yet no one is safe until everyone is safe."

In three short months, the CDC has abandoned all COVID-19 public health measures, abdicating any role as the nation's public health protector. The CDC has step-by-step dismissed the social distancing guidelines at schools,

relaxed restriction guidelines for vaccinated individuals, essentially abandoned the need for mask usage by those fully vaccinated, relying on "the honor system" for those that aren't, and, most recently, discontinued tracking all breakthrough infections, which focus on those that develop severe illness, hospitalization or death after being fully inoculated.

The focus is no longer on the pandemic and why it happened but on the celebrations that are being encouraged and gleefully described. In a celebratory article published in the *Wall Street Journal* headlined "The Great American Reunion," the message was that "America's reunion summer" had begun, although most of these "reunions" will involve low-wage workers driven back to jobs they hate by the cutting off of unemployment benefits.

Airports are now hovering around 90 percent pre-pandemic capacities, with more than three million travelers checked by the Transportation Security Administration on Sunday. Social distancing at airports is no longer possible due to crowd sizes. Airport officials are also reporting thousands of cases of disorderly conduct by people who refuse to comply with masking rules.

Many principled epidemiologists have raised concerns that the supposed return to normalcy has occurred far too quickly and capriciously. Cases and deaths across the nation remain far too high. The seven-day moving average of new infections has consistently remained over 20,000 cases per day.

The United States has currently only fully vaccinated 41 percent of the population. Only 51 percent have received at least one dose. There has also been a 28 percent decline in weekly doses administered. The weekly average of jabs given has declined from a peak of 3.35 million doses per day on April 15 down to 1.32 million per day on May 30.

Many of the poorest states, especially in the Southeast—Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Tennessee—have fully vaccinated less than one-third of their populations. With only 29 percent having received both doses of the COVID vaccines, Alabama saw a

59 percent decline in vaccine administration from last week. Health officials are worried that many people are refusing to seek vaccines that remain available to them. The mask mandates have been lifted, and businesses are returning to normal activities.

Given the threat posed by the various strains of more transmissible coronaviruses, comments like those of Governor Baker and Dr. Walensky must be viewed with harsh skepticism. Under the current trend, 15,000 people will die each month and 175,000 in one year. To place this figure into context, estimated deaths from influenza from 2018 to 2019 were shy of 35,000. Yet the corporate media has completely abandoned any talk of enforcing any public health measures nor the implications of the present death toll.

Northern Missouri is one area where outbreaks of cases are developing, especially among young adults and children. With Mother's Day celebrations, graduations, and senior trips, cases of COVID-19 have suddenly spiked. Since April 30, Linn County has tallied 180 COVID cases or 1.5 percent of the county's 11,920 residents. In Livingston County, just to the west, 240 cases were reported in May. The Livingston County Health Center posted on May 20 on their Facebook page, "Our active number is the highest it has ever been since the beginning of the pandemic."

Outbreaks in these rural regions offer a glimpse into how the pandemic in the US could play out. According to Dr. William Powderly of the Washington University College of Medicine, "What we are going to see, increasingly across the country, and in Missouri, is that vaccination will lead to the situation where we have two populations—one where people are very unlikely to develop COVID and those who are still vulnerable. The CDC, in its recent guidelines, was very careful to distinguish between recommendations for vaccinated people and for unvaccinated people."

However, he added, "The difficulty for public health officials is that resistance to masks, accompanied by the May 16 guidance that fully vaccinated people could ditch their masks in most situations, means almost no one is wearing them." Missouri's rural counties, where many had escaped the initial ravages faced by larger cities and densely populated coastal metropolitan regions, are now facing renewed threats.

Low vaccination rates and the threats posed by the new strains, compounded by the complete abandonment of any restrictions, means coronavirus continues to pose a considerable threat to these vulnerable regions of the United States. Dr. Powderly noted, "People have interpreted the drop in the numbers as a victory, that we have won the war against COVID."

Though the CDC's variant tracker has yet to report the

number of the B.1.617.2 variants detected in the US, two weeks ago, the health department in Cleveland County, Oklahoma, identified seventeen such cases, three in people fully vaccinated with the Moderna vaccine.

It should be noted that antibodies obtained from individuals fully vaccinated have demonstrated a lower capacity to neutralize variants like the B.1.351 than wild types. More importantly, waning immunity with coronavirus vaccines needs to be more carefully studied and the question of needing to administer boosters addressed. The current threat posed by the B.1.617.2 (India) variant in the UK should be given serious consideration in the US.

Naturally, many are relieved that they have finally been fully vaccinated. At the same time, many are also mourning loved ones who have succumbed to the coronavirus. Memorial Day weekend is a federal holiday for honoring and mourning those lost in the performance of their military duties. In many ways, comparing the more than 610,000 lives lost in the pandemic to losing life in wars is apt. In both instances, the blame for the slaughter lies squarely with the ruling elites. But rather than it being a day of remembering, the weekend is being celebrated as a day of forgetting how so many lives were and continue to be lost to a virus.

As the United States encourages barbecues and get-togethers, the world's poorest nations are facing renewed threats. Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on May 24, in his opening remarks at the 74th World Health Assembly, succinctly said, "Almost 18 months into the defining health crisis of our age, the world remains in a very dangerous situation. As of today, more cases have been reported so far this year than in the whole of 2020. On current trends, the number of deaths will overtake last year's total within the next three weeks ... globally we remain in a fragile situation."



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