

CDC's lifting of mask recommendations in US schools threatens massive surge of infections

Evan Blake
11 July 2021

Last Friday, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) abruptly released new guidelines on reopening K–12 schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, effectively scrapping all mitigation measures. The guidelines encourage vaccinated teachers and students not to wear masks and promote the full reopening of schools regardless of vaccination levels, even if they cannot guarantee three feet of distance between students.

The guideline changes, which have been universally hailed by the corporate media, the entire political establishment and the teachers unions, amount to the reckless endangerment of millions of children, educators, parents and the broader population. They take place under conditions in which the highly infectious and lethal Delta variant of the coronavirus is already the dominant strain in the US and causing a major surge of infections. Worldometer reported a near-doubling of daily new cases in the US last week, from 15,326 last Tuesday to 27,237 last Friday.

Children under 12, roughly half the school-aged population, are not expected to be eligible for any vaccine until September, meaning that tens of millions of students would be unvaccinated during most of the fall semester if not longer. If fully implemented, the CDC guidelines will ensure that roughly 42 million unvaccinated children are packed into poorly-ventilated school buildings across the US in the coming weeks, creating the perfect conditions for the airborne virus to spread like wildfire.

Over the past year, the federal government under both Trump and Biden criminally refused to track COVID-19 infections in K–12 schools. According to the CDC's own estimates, which the corporate media have covered up, as of May 19 roughly 22.7 million children under 18 years old had been infected with COVID-19, with a large percentage undoubtedly taking place in K–12 schools. The new guidelines will vastly expand these figures, causing untold long-term damage to an entire generation. Various studies estimate that between 7 to 20 percent of infected children develop Long COVID in which symptoms linger for months after their initial infection.

Friday's announcement by the CDC marks the latest in a

series of unscientific, politically-motivated measures that the institution has enacted on behalf of Wall Street and the Biden administration, as part of the broader ruling class campaign to fully reopen the economy and fabricate the illusion that the pandemic is over.

Interviewed on ABC's *This Week*, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) Director Anthony Fauci stated, "The bottom line is we need to get the children back in school, in-person classes in the fall." Regarding social distancing within classrooms, Fauci added, "even though those are the things you want to pay attention to, if you can't implement them, you should still do everything you can with testing... do everything you can to keep the in-person classes going."

Speaking on CBS' *Face the Nation*, former Commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Dr. Scott Gottlieb bluntly stated, "I don't think they're really going to do checking [on vaccination status]. I think what's going to happen is some schools are going to implement mask mandates, others won't, depending on what state you're in."

Indeed, eight states—Utah, Arizona, Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Iowa, Vermont and South Carolina—have already banned the issuing of masking requirements by local school districts. So far, only California has said they plan to continue require masking in schools, although this will likely be curtailed in the coming weeks before districts begin reopening.

The CDC's latest unscientific guidelines have provoked opposition among educators, who have borne enormous stress and suffering during the past year of being forced to return to unsafe classrooms.

Clair, a teacher in Alabama, commented, "The CDC has shown us once again that the health and concern for students and teachers are not their priority. They are okay with us dying because they need kids in school so that parents can go to work. No one cared to find out why children were less sick this year. It's because they were largely out of school. If you think there's a teacher shortage now, wait until the Delta variant starts taking lives again. You would think scientists would want to preserve life but the CDC unfortunately has proven to be a

political puppet. Teachers, do what you must to preserve your health. Parents, ask the hard questions necessary because your children's lives are in danger."

Djk Freeman, a teacher in Tennessee, stated, "Without any mention of the risk and uncertainty we will face entering classrooms this fall, the CDC states that the priority is for a return to in-person instruction. Despite conflicting information from health agencies regarding the threat of the deadly Delta variant, vaccine effectiveness, and mask protocols even for the vaccinated, state and local governments are being entrusted to determine for themselves the level of safety protocols needed in their communities. What a joke! When antiscience sentiment is running rampant in state legislatures, local health departments are being stripped of their powers, and vaccination rates are barely at 50 percent nationwide, how can we be expected to trust that our leaders will do the right thing when they have already proven they will not? Once again the CDC is placing the health and well-being of the economy ahead of the lives of teachers, students, and families."

In contrast to the hostility of rank-and-file teachers, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and National Education Association (NEA) immediately endorsed the updated CDC guidelines. AFT President Randi Weingarten, who in May pledged to help fully reopen schools this fall, absurdly described the guidelines as "grounded in both science and common sense." NEA President Becky Pringle, who recently covered up the deaths and suffering of educators during the 2020–21 school year at the NEA's convention, voiced her agreement, adding, "There is no substitute for in-person learning."

While the CDC guidelines are framed as applying to the fall semester, they were issued during an unprecedented summer school in which major districts across the US have opened their doors to as many students as possible, as part of the broader effort to pressure parents to return to work. Many districts and states will likely invoke the new CDC guidelines to justify their reckless summer school plans. In most districts, huge numbers of teachers have opted out of teaching this summer, meaning that understaffed classrooms will be packed to the brim with students.

In New York City, the largest school district in the US with roughly 1.1 million students, over 200,000 have enrolled in summer school. Despite a teacher shortage, city authorities are actively encouraging more parents to sign up. Setting a precedent for every other city in the country, the district will not offer any virtual instruction options this fall.

Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the second-largest in the US with over 660,000 students, has an unprecedented 100,000 students currently enrolled in summer school. The School District of Philadelphia (SDP) has roughly 15,000 students enrolled in summer school, triple its normal amount. Guilford County Schools in North Carolina has 12,000 students enrolled, roughly 10 times the annual average before

the pandemic. Broward County in Florida has roughly five times its normal enrollment this summer, with 45,000 students attending in-person.

As a harbinger of what will transpire in districts across the US this summer and fall, in late June two summer school programs in St. Joseph School District, Missouri, were forced to switch online after COVID-19 outbreaks infected or led to the quarantining of over half of the students in each class. Missouri has one of the lowest rates of vaccination in the US, and the Delta variant has spread rapidly throughout the state.

The CDC's abrupt change of masking guidelines and demand that schools fully reopen, which was clearly coordinated with the Biden administration, took place exactly one year after the Trump administration similarly pressed for all schools to reopen. On July 6, 2020, Trump tweeted, "SCHOOLS MUST OPEN IN THE FALL!!!" This marked the beginning of a massive campaign to reopen schools in order to compel parents back to work, which escalated under Biden with the fulsome support of the unions. At every turn, this campaign provoked widespread resistance by educators, leading to the growth of rank-and-file committees independent of the teachers unions and both big business parties in states across the US.

To prevent the looming catastrophe posed by the CDC's latest scrapping of COVID-19 mitigation measures, educators, parents and students must expand the network of Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees to every district and state. These committees must unite with broader sections of the working class now entering into struggle, including Volvo Trucks workers in Virginia, Warrior Met miners in Alabama, health care workers in Chicago and Massachusetts, ATI steelworkers in Pennsylvania and other states, Frito-Lay workers in Kansas and more. All those who wish to fight for this perspective should sign up today to get involved.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact