

Biden administration doubles down on fully opening schools amid surge of Delta variant

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16 July 2021

In an extraordinary interview on NBC News Thursday evening, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky doubled down on the Biden administration's homicidal demand that schools fully reopen this fall, months before any children under 12 years old can be vaccinated.

One week ago, the CDC released new guidelines on K–12 schools that encourage vaccinated teachers and students not to wear masks and promote the full reopening of schools regardless of vaccination levels and distancing between students. These are the latest in a series of reckless guidelines issued by the CDC during the pandemic, making clear that the institution has become wholly subservient to the interests of Wall Street and the major corporations that demand the full reopening of schools to facilitate the return of parents to unsafe workplaces.

Walensky's interview was the featured news segment and was prefaced with a video clip documenting the horrific spread of the highly infectious and lethal Delta coronavirus variant, which has prompted Los Angeles County to re-implement an indoor mask mandate for public spaces. The video clip and interview express the callous indifference of the capitalist political and media establishment to the lives of the working class, including the most vulnerable, children, whose health would be protected at all costs in a rational and humane society.

After noting that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced Thursday that they do not expect to approve any vaccines for roughly 48 million children under 12 years old until the start of 2022 at the earliest, reporter Miguel Almaguer stated callously, "While more than four million children have contracted COVID, less than two percent have been hospitalized and only a small fraction have died." He added, "But now our nation is bracing for a tidal wave of new infections, as experts fear a new flood of COVID cases is just beginning to grip the

country."

Noting that 98 million Americans remain unvaccinated and that 48 states are seeing a rising number of infections, Almaguer concluded ominously, "for the unvaccinated, including the youngest Americans, the worst may still be to come."

Host Lester Holt then proceeded to interview Walensky, asking, "We've got the Delta variant, we've got rising infections, we've got dropping vaccination rates; is this becoming a worst-case scenario?"

Walensky responded, "Unfortunately, no, I think things can still get worse, which is why we're doing everything we can now to make sure that that doesn't happen."

A naive viewer would expect Walensky to then announce the reversal of the CDC's promotion of school reopenings, call for the immediate implementation of a nationwide lockdown of nonessential workplaces, and stress the need for a massive expansion of COVID-19 testing, contact tracing and quarantining programs. Instead, she immediately contradicted her own statement, making clear the CDC would continue to scrap all public health measures.

Holt asked, "Watching what this Delta variant is doing right now, and the knowledge now that it could be wintertime next year before kids are eligible for a vaccine, is there any consideration, any scenario in which you might want to reverse yourself on reopening schools?"

Walensky replied, "I remain emphatic that our schools need to open in the fall. They need to open for full, in-person learning. We know how to keep our children safe. If they're eligible for vaccination, we can keep them safe by being vaccinated. If they're not eligible for vaccination, we can keep them safe in two important ways: surround them with people who are vaccinated, and when they go to school put a mask on."

Holt then asked, "Is it time to consider or offer more consideration to masking up even vaccinated people in

indoor settings?” Walensky responded, “These vaccines work, they generally work against the Delta variant in preventing severe hospitalization and death. In terms of masking, you know those are gonna be personal decisions as you engage outside in other activities.”

In response to Holt’s final question, “CDC is not recommending people who are fully vaccinated wear masks?” Walensky bluntly stated, “We are not.”

The Biden administration’s campaign to fully open schools in the coming weeks takes place amid a catastrophic surge of the Delta variant, with daily new cases rising from 17,625 on July 1 to 37,548 on July 15, more than doubling in just weeks. On Thursday, nine states reported over 1,000 new infections, with Florida reporting 7,011. While infections are predominantly impacting unvaccinated people, there are growing numbers of breakthrough cases in which vaccinated people become infected.

With only 25 percent of children ages 12–15 vaccinated and 37 percent of those ages 16–17 vaccinated, roughly 42 million children remain unvaccinated in the US and highly susceptible to the Delta variant. Studies on the long-term impacts of COVID-19 on children have not been conclusive, but estimates are that somewhere between 7 to 20 percent of infected children have symptoms that linger for months after their initial infection.

In Mississippi, where only 33.4 percent of the population is fully vaccinated, the *Sun Herald* reported Wednesday that seven children are currently in intensive care units with COVID-19, including two on ventilators. In addition, roughly 7 percent of recent COVID-19 deaths in the state were among vaccinated people.

The dangers posed to students, educators, parents and the broader population are starkly demonstrated in the UK, where an aggressive school reopening campaign has led to massive levels of infection with the Delta variant. Last week, 840,000 students were reported absent from school, either due to becoming infected with COVID-19 or self-isolating due to possible exposure. This figure represents 11.2 percent of all students in the UK, up from 8.5 percent the week prior and 5.1 percent two weeks prior.

As of this writing, only eight US states—California, Washington, New Mexico, North Carolina, Virginia, New York and Connecticut—continue to have mask mandates for all schools. Another eight states have barred local districts from implementing any mask mandates, including Texas, Utah, Arizona, Oklahoma, Arkansas, South Carolina, Vermont and Iowa. The remaining 34

states are leaving the decision in the hands of local school districts, with roughly 70 percent of all students living in states that either ban masking in schools or allow local districts to implement such bans, according to burbio.com. Chandler Unified School District in Arizona, one of the first school districts to reopen in the US, will have a voluntary masking policy in its schools as they begin reopening next Wednesday.

The push to fully reopen schools and lift all safety measures in the US is part of a global process. Last week, United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) published a joint statement calling for the full reopening of schools worldwide.

They wrote, “It’s been 18 months since the COVID-19 outbreak started and education for millions of children is still disrupted. As of today, primary and secondary schools are shuttered in 19 countries, affecting over 156 million students. This should not go on. Schools should be the last to close and the first to reopen... All schools should provide in-person learning as soon as possible, without barriers to access, including not mandating vaccination prior to school entry.”

While many educators and parents are genuinely concerned about learning loss among students and the challenges of remote learning, the politicians are motivated solely by the economic imperatives of big business to send parents back to work producing profits. In the case of UNESCO, Director-General Audrey Azoulay is a member of the Socialist Party in France and served as the Minister of Culture under Prime Minister Manuel Valls from 2016–17. As with Walensky at the CDC, she is committed to upholding the interests of the capitalists and is more than willing to manipulate science to those ends.



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