

Five-year-old dies of COVID-19 in Georgia as Biden administration pushes to fully open schools

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On Friday, Wyatt Gary Gibson died from COVID-19 at Erlanger Hospital in Chattanooga, Tennessee, after a short battle with the virus. He was just 5 years old.

Wyatt was the son of Alexis Gibson and her husband Wes Gibson, a deputy with the Whitfield County Sheriff's Office, and brother to a 9-month-old sister.

Local reports indicate that the entire Gibson family contracted COVID-19. However, Wyatt was the only member of the family that experienced complications, including a stroke. Tragically, the young boy was admitted to the hospital with "COVID pneumonia" early in the week and died just a few days after.

As with all too many families, the Gibsons are now experiencing the worst nightmare of any parent.

Wyatt is the fourth child under age 10 who has died of COVID-19 in Georgia alone, according to the official tally from the Georgia Department of Public Health (GDPH). The three other child deaths in the state include a 7-year-old boy from Chatham County, a 7-year-old girl from Clayton County, and a 1-year-old boy from Cobb County.

As in many countries throughout the world, the United States is experiencing a major new upsurge of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the past month alone, daily cases have increased by a staggering 250 percent. The increase in cases has driven a rise in hospitalizations and a significant increase in the daily death rate.

The main source of the rise in cases is coming from the new Delta variant of COVID-19, the most infectious and deadliest variant of the virus that the world has seen so far. In fact, a study published earlier this month noted that the viral load of people infected with the Delta variant was 1,000 times greater than those infected by the initial form of the disease.

The increase in cases is mostly affecting the unvaccinated population. In the US, less than half of the population is fully vaccinated, including all children under 12 for whom no vaccines have yet been approved.

In an interview yesterday on ABC News, US Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy explained that the low rate of vaccinated people in the US is putting children under 12 at a greater risk: "Our kids depend on us, the people around them, being protected, being vaccinated, in order to shield them from the virus. And that's why, again, it's so important for us to get vaccinated."

A number of harrowing child deaths in recent weeks underscore the seriousness of the situation:

- Earlier this month, Virginia witnessed the state's second death of a child younger than age 10. The state's health department announced the latest death last Thursday and did not give the child's exact age or location, saying only that they were in the Rappahannock Area Health District.

- On June 28 in Charlotte, North Carolina, 15-year-old Alyssa Simons died from COVID-19 complications. Alyssa was diagnosed with multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C) in June after her entire family tested positive for the virus in March. According to local reports, Alyssa was released from the hospital and appeared to be recovering. Shortly afterwards, she died at home in her sleep. "I just miss her hugs, her kisses, just conversations with her. Everything. Everything," her mother told the local press.

- Mesa County, Colorado reported its first child COVID-19 death in May, another 15-year-old girl, Kaci Loux. Kaci tested positive for the Delta variant and was hospitalized before her age group was eligible for the vaccine, the health department said. The local news reported that her mother thought Kaci was improving. "They're getting ready to put her into recovery and then everything just went to hell," she said. Her daughter went into cardiac arrest and passed away after nearly a month in the hospital.

While it is true that young children are less likely to become seriously ill or die from the virus, they *do* still die. Moreover, there is every possibility that children are now at greater risk of becoming seriously ill or dying due to the

aggressive character of the new Delta variant. There has simply not been enough data collected on the Delta variant itself to know how it may impact children more or less than the other variants.

Under these conditions, in an astonishing indictment of the Biden administration, roughly one third of the largest school districts in the US will *not* be offering students the option to learn safely in remote settings this school year, according to a recent tally from Burbio, a website that tracks school calendars and reopenings.

Of the 200 largest districts, 128 will hold virtual programs this fall, while 60 will offer no remote learning option whatsoever. These include New York City, Newark and Chicago, with a combined enrollment of roughly 1.5 million students. Another 12 districts have yet to announce their plans.

Aware of all of the devastating information on the Delta variant, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky has continued to make clear her commitment to reopening schools. When asked last week, “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.”

In other words, millions of parents will be forced to send their children into schools with unmasked, unvaccinated children as the deadliest variant of the virus known to scientists rips through the country.

To add insult to injury, the forced reopening of schools will also coincide with the cutoff of federal unemployment, the ending of eviction moratoriums, and skyrocketing inflation. In what amounts to economic blackmail, working class families who may wish to keep their children home for their safety, will not be able to afford it, even if it is an option in their district.

As the WSWS has analyzed throughout the pandemic, the forced reopening of schools is a central pillar of the ruling class drive to fully reopen the economy and keep profits rolling in. The first six months of the Biden administration have proven that his policies are virtually indistinguishable from those of former US President Donald Trump.

Regarding school reopenings, upon his election Biden immediately made clear this would be one of his central domestic policies, and since January his administration and the CDC have conspired with local Democrats and the teachers unions to ruthlessly reopen every major district that was still learning remotely.

Two graphs from Burbio’s K-12 School Opening Tracker show the extent of this campaign throughout the spring. The graphs show “In-Person Index,” or the percentage of

students that are going to schools that offer in-person learning. The graphs weight the percentage of virtual instruction at 0, the percentage of hybrid instruction (2-3 days per week in-person) at 50 and the percentage traditional (5-days in person) at 100. The first graph shows the in-person index from K-12 public schools as of January 1st, 2021, while the second shows the in-person index from K-12 public schools as of June 1, 2021.

The Biden administration’s policy of reopening for in-person learning has directly coincided with the increase in cases, hospitalizations and deaths.

All of the scientific evidence available decisively reveals that stopping the pandemic requires the closure of schools and nonessential businesses. The WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party demand that these measures be carried out with full compensation for all workers and small businesses affected by these necessary lock-downs.

Moreover, in order to stop the virus there must be a massive allocation of social resources to erect an advanced and humane contact tracing system that ensures that every case of COVID-19 is contained in order to save lives and to stop the virus from spreading and further mutating.

No confidence can be put in either capitalist party to carry out these measures. If the pandemic is going to be stopped and lives saved, it will only come from the collective action of the workers themselves. The WSWS urges teachers, parents, students and other workers to join or form rank-and-file committees in your district or neighborhood to demand the closure of schools and non-essential workplaces while the pandemic is contained.

Educators, parents and students must and will resist the efforts to fully reopen schools for in-person learning under conditions in which the pandemic is still spreading. We urge readers to contact us today to learn more about forming a rank-and-file committee in your district or neighborhood.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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