

Rise in COVID-19 cases among children surge in major US hotspots

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Florida, Missouri and Arkansas have become major hotspots of the fourth wave of the coronavirus pandemic in the US. The severity of the Delta variant, expressed in a rise in cases, hospitalizations and deaths has not spared children and youth ages 0-17, who have been placed in grave danger as schools across the country have fully reopened for summer school and the upcoming fall semester.

Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Human Health Services (HHS) shows the seven-day national average of cases has risen 52 percent, deaths have increased 18 percent and hospitalizations have increased by 20 percent. The dominance of the Delta variant coupled with low vaccination rates has caused cases to surge in recent weeks across the country, reaching levels not seen since the spring. Vaccinations have stagnated across the country, with many states reporting well under 50 percent of their populations fully vaccinated. The threat to the half the population who are still unvaccinated has not halted the lifting of restrictions in Democratic- or Republican-controlled states.

Florida is currently the epicenter of the pandemic in the US. On Thursday, the Florida Department of Health reported 12,647 new infections and 86 deaths. Between July 15 and July 21, the state reported 45,449 new cases of coronavirus, far surpassing other states. It has seen a major surge with over 3,000 cases among children reported from July 8 through July 15, resulting in a greater than 80 percent increase among youth age groups from the two weeks prior.

Significantly, the Florida Department of Health stopped reporting hospitalizations among children on June 24 obscuring the severity of cases among the thousands of children who have tested positive throughout the state in recent days.

Despite the alarming situation, Republican Governor

Ron DeSantis continues to downplay the dangers of the pandemic. In a statement Thursday, DeSantis vowed there would be no mask mandates in schools or COVID-related lockdowns this fall. In response to the recommendation by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) earlier this week that all students two or older and school staff wear masks, DeSantis said, "We're not doing that in Florida. Ok? We need our kids to breathe."

Earlier this week DeSantis spoke of the deadly virus in nonchalant language, declaring that cases will naturally drop in August claiming, "It's a seasonal virus, and this is the seasonal pattern it follows in the Sun Belt states."

In Missouri, on Wednesday health officials recorded over 2,000 new COVID-19 cases for the second time in seven days, as well as eight new deaths. More than 1,500 hospitalizations have been reported, up almost 50 percent over two weeks ago and remaining inpatient hospital bed capacity hovers around 21 percent.

Among children in Missouri, 1,356 cases were reported during the week of July 8 through July 15. A group of 100 Kansas City-area physicians signed a letter calling on school districts to require masks for all students under the age of 12, who are not currently eligible for the vaccine. Districts can decide whether to mandate masks, but regardless, full reopening plans with entirely inadequate mitigation and crowded classrooms will continue.

Missouri Governor Mike Parson has responded to the surge by announcing an insulting \$9 million COVID-19 vaccine incentive program on Wednesday, offering 900 residents who get the vaccine a chance to win \$10,000 in cash or \$10,000 toward education savings. There are no significant efforts being made to overcome vaccine hesitancy through educational campaigns.

In Arkansas, 1,875 new cases were reported on Tuesday bringing the current number of active cases throughout the state to 11,475. Hospitalizations have also been on the rise, increasing by 49 since Monday. On Saturday, the

University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences in Little Rock announced that its hospital, a public facility ranked among the best in the state, was full.

On Tuesday, Arkansas Children's Hospital reported 12 COVID-19 hospitalizations among children, with half in critical condition diagnosed with COVID-pneumonia or on ventilation support.

In an interview with CNN on Tuesday, Dr. Rick Barr, Chief Clinical Officer at Arkansas Children's Hospital, remarked on the virulence of the Delta variant among children. He said, "The Delta variant is different than what we were seeing. We have 12 children admitted to the hospital now with COVID, that's triple our usual numbers we saw during the previous months of the pandemic, and they seem to be much sicker."

Arkansas Secretary of Health Dr. Jose Romero warned in an interview with CNN Tuesday that one of his "major fears" is the virus spreading in schools this fall as children return to in-person instruction. Romero emphasized, "We're seeing outbreaks in sites that we didn't see last year. So we're seeing closures in day cares, we're seeing closures in summer camps, and all that leads me to believe that in a setting where you don't have strict mitigation that it will spread very, very quickly in our schools."

According to a weekly report from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the Children's Hospital Association, cases among children nearly doubled across the US July 1 through July 15, from 12,102 to 23,551. The report also notes a marked increase in hospitalizations among children with an increase of 236 cases over the same time period.

The report also highlights the vast limitations of state reporting of COVID-19 data among children. Just 11 states currently report the age distribution of tests, and only 23 states plus New York City provide the age distribution of COVID-19 hospitalizations. Seven states do not report the ages of COVID-19 deaths. Notably, and despite a major surge in COVID-19 cases across the US, Nebraska stopped reporting COVID-19 data entirely on June 30, and Iowa stopped updating its child testing data on July 15.

This underreporting reveals an underestimation of the scope and severity of the virus' impact and points to the deliberate attempts by state and federal government officials to normalize the pandemic. The working class is told they and their families must live, and die, with the virus.

Over the course of the past year and a half, there has

been no federal program to track infections tied to schools. All reporting has been left to the local level. Districts have made sure to portray K-12 schools as being safe havens from COVID-19 spread due to entirely inadequate testing and contact tracing protocols. It has largely been up to independent voices, such as Florida data analyst and founder of the COVID Monitor, Rebekah Jones, who has been pursued by DeSantis and Florida officials for exposing COVID-19 cases in K-12 schools across the US and the dangers of in-person learning amid the ongoing pandemic.

In a press brief last week, CDC Director Rochelle Walensky noted, "This is becoming a pandemic of the unvaccinated. We are seeing outbreaks of cases in parts of the country that have low vaccination coverage, because unvaccinated people are at risk." On Wednesday President Biden spoke at a CNN town hall noting that the CDC may come out with recommendations for children under 12 to wear masks in schools and noted that this age group will be eligible for the vaccine "soon," emphasizing, "I do not tell any scientist what they should do."

The Biden administration has doubled down on efforts to push an estimated 56 million children in K-12 schools into crowded, poorly ventilated classrooms this fall where the vast majority of students will be unvaccinated. Currently only 25 percent of children ages 12-15 are vaccinated, and 37 percent of young people 16-17 are fully vaccinated. Children under 12 have yet to receive one dose of the vaccine.

A monumental crime is being perpetrated against an entire generation of youth at the hands of the ruling elite, federal and state governments, and the trade unions who all agree on the full reopening of schools and the economy as a whole at the expense of human lives. Parents and educators must and will resist this murderous reopening campaign through the building of rank-and-file committees.



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