

Casualties of reopening schools: Children dying from COVID-19

Niles Niemuth
18 August 2021

Ryland Lee Daic died on August 10 at the Children’s Memorial Hermann Hospital in Houston, Texas, after contracting COVID-19. He was just one month shy of his thirteenth birthday and set to start the sixth grade at Woodrow Wilson Junior High in Dayton, Texas.

His mother, Casey Castorina, told Bluebonnet News that Daic’s illness took a quick turn for the worse from initial mild cold-like symptoms to only being able to speak in a whisper. Castorina rushed him to an emergency clinic and then to the hospital in Houston where he was placed in a medically induced coma.

“They ended up putting him on life support. His lungs had filled with fluid from COVID. The doctors and nurses did everything they could for him but he died on Tuesday,” she explained. “It was stupid fast.”

Mkayla Robinson, 13, died on Saturday, just one day after testing positive for COVID-19. The eighth grader was already back in classes at Raleigh Junior High in Raleigh, Mississippi, without any mask requirements, when she got ill. Robinson was among 76 confirmed cases among students and 11 among staff. The school board has voted to shut down for two weeks after 700 people were in quarantine as of Tuesday. While Republican Governor Tate Reeves has dismissed coronavirus infections in children as “the sniffles,” Robinson is the fifth child to die from COVID-19 in Mississippi.

Seventeen-year-old Matthew Kirby of Creedmoor, North Carolina, spent nine days in an intensive care unit with COVID-19 before he succumbed to the disease last Thursday. His father, Stephen Kirby, reported in a post on Facebook that the infection has caused myocarditis, inflammation of the heart which can trigger a heart attack or stroke. Matthew’s parents also contracted the disease and are planning a memorial for their son once they recover.

Matthew Kirby was passionate about baseball and had played for Dirtbags Baseball, a travel team based in Burlington, North Carolina, which prepares young players for the college and major league level.

“It was crushing to me,” Dirtbags’ chief operating officer

Roxann Markey told WRAL Durham. “I have three children of my own, and so, when you hear that, you’re devastated for the family. You immediately put yourself in their position and how would you feel if you were in this scenario. ... This is getting really serious, and we want to make sure that everybody is taking it serious because, to lose a child, I mean, there’s nothing worse.”

An unidentified 16 year old died of COVID-19 on August 5 at Wolfson Children’s Hospital in Jacksonville, Florida. The hospital reports that the teen had no underlying health issues but was unvaccinated. This marked the first pediatric death of the latest surge of the pandemic at a hospital which services one of the cities hardest-hit by the fourth wave—fueled by the more infectious Delta variant—which has been ravaging the South and is pushing up cases in the rest of the US. Republican Governor Ron DeSantis has banned schools from implementing mask mandates and threatened to pull state funding from districts that put requirements in place.

These are just four of the latest and youngest victims of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States and more are to come as the ruling class pushes forward with the reopening of schools for in-person learning.

Their deaths are the outcome of a bipartisan policy to eliminate all measures which would control the spread of the virus while only half of the population is fully vaccinated, including all of those under 12 who remain ineligible for inoculation. The purpose is to keep workers on the job and block the implementation of measures which would save lives and suppress the pandemic—mask mandates, the closure of non-essential business and lockdowns—but would lead to a fall in the stock market.

This campaign has been based on a foundation of lies: that children do not contract COVID-19, if they do contract it, it is not serious, and that they cannot pass the virus on to others around them. The push to reopen schools, pioneered last year by Donald Trump and the Republicans, has been taken up by President Joe Biden and the Democrats with the full support of the unions.

At a town hall in February, Biden told a worried second grader, “You’re not likely to be able to be exposed to something and spread it to mommy or daddy.” He went on to falsely reassure her, “Kids don’t get ... COVID very often. It’s unusual for that to happen,” adding, “You’re in the safest group of people in the whole world.” Biden, who pledged during the election campaign to “follow the science,” is doing exactly the opposite.

Scientific studies confirm that children can contract COVID-19 and spread it to their friends, siblings, parents and grandparents. Schools serve as super-spreader sites, with children passing the virus on to teachers and staff and vice versa.

In the face of the evidence, Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers (salary \$560,000 per year) and Becky Pringle, head of the National Education Association (salary exceeding \$370,000 per year), have fully backed the push to return students, teachers and staff into classrooms which are hothouses of the pandemic. “The number one priority is to get kids to be back in school,” Weingarten declared earlier this month.

The main concern of the Democrats and the unions is that opposition to mask and vaccine mandates by Republican governors will impede the effort to reopen schools and to keep them open throughout the school year.

As a result of the murderous reopening policy, a growing number of children are contracting the virus just as schools across the country are beginning to reopen, setting the stage for a further eruption in infections and deaths. Tens of thousands of students and school employees have already been sent home to quarantine after testing positive for COVID-19 or coming into close contact with someone who did at school.

The American Association of Pediatrics (AAP) reported Monday that over 121,000 child COVID-19 cases were confirmed in the second week of August, the highest number since the end of January. More than 4.4 million children have now tested positive for the disease. The number of children hospitalized hit a record high this week, exceeding 1,900 for the first time in the pandemic, accounting for 2.4 percent of all COVID-19 hospitalizations in the country.

According to the AAP, there have been 29 reported child deaths in the 43 states and New York City which provide age distributions just since July 22, when the first schools began to reopen for the fall semester.

In addition to the possibility of serious illness and death, COVID-19 has been shown to severely impact cognitive development, on par with lead poisoning. And there are numerous other risks for young people associated with the virus, including developing long COVID and multisystem inflammatory syndrome (MIS-C), which sets in several

weeks after an initial COVID infection. Over 4,400 cases of MIS-C have been diagnosed in the US and 37 deaths reported, primarily affecting kids between ages 6 and 12.

Then there is the life-long damage of children losing their parent or grandparent to the virus. Preliminary Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data reviewed by ABC News last month showed that more than 140,000 children have lost a primary or secondary caregiver to COVID-19.

How many children must die or have their lives destroyed so that the insatiable need of Wall Street for profits can be met?

Already parents are protesting to demand that their children’s schools take measures to protect lives. Parents in Killeen, Texas, gathered outside the school district’s administration building Tuesday to demand the school mandate and provide masks to the 46,000 students and implement sanitation measures.

Parents have also protested to demand safety measures in Cobb County, Georgia, where there have been 253 confirmed infections since July 1 and an entire fifth grade class had to be sent home for online learning after an outbreak. Similar protests have been held by concerned parents at the state Capitol in Des Moines, Iowa, and outside the Miami-Dade County Public Schools building in Miami, Florida.

There is no excuse for endangering the lives of millions of children! So-called “mitigation” strategies are, at best, inadequate and create a false sense of security. Moreover, given the deplorable state of schools throughout the country, “mitigation” amounts to applying a band-aide to an infected wound. The only effective strategy for combatting the virus and saving lives, those of children and adults alike, is one focussed on eradicating the virus.

This means an immediate halt to the homicidal reopening of schools for in-person learning and keeping them closed until the pandemic is contained. Parents must demand full financial support to allow them to stay home while their children learn remotely.

Educators and parents must form rank-and-file safety committees in every school and workplace, independent of the unions and the Democrats and Republicans, to coordinate the struggle to stop the reopening of schools and put an end to the pandemic.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)