

Photo of sick Florida woman lying on the floor of treatment center goes viral as demand for COVID-19 antiviral treatment surges

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A photo of a Florida woman experiencing painful COVID-19 symptoms went viral this week after she was discovered lying on the floor of a monoclonal antibody treatment facility in Jacksonville. The widely circulated picture produced shock and outrage as the state continues to grapple with an unprecedented spike in infections, hospitalizations and deaths from the coronavirus.

The photo was taken at a downtown library which has been converted into a treatment center to support the scores of sick patients that have overflowed every hospital in the city, leading to a grave shortage of beds and ICUs for critically ill cases. The woman was found by her husband, who took the photo, lying on her stomach in a near-fetal position and semi-conscious while awaiting desperately needed medical attention. Another patient who posted the picture on Reddit says she “saw people crying in pain,” while waiting for treatment.

One of the original posts with the picture carried a caption describing how appalling conditions had become for the ill. The poster said that her husband, who was vaccinated but still tested positive for the virus, had been waiting for more than two hours just for monoclonal therapy and expressed shock over the number of people waiting for help. “He has never seen people so sick,” the post read. Sick patients were seen all around the facility “moaning, crying, unable to move.”

Florida has become the third state in the US to reach 3 million confirmed cases of COVID-19, a total surpassed by just 15 countries worldwide. COVID-19 patients now account for approximately 30 percent of all hospital patients in the state, the highest total on record. There were 17,235 people hospitalized for COVID-19 on Saturday, an uptick of 37 from the day prior.

Although total reported cases in the state fell very slightly last week, 150,740 compared to 151,764, deaths rose sharply, an indication that the gap between the tsunami of hospitalizations across the state and recorded fatalities is

beginning to diminish. The state saw 1,486 deaths last week compared to 1,071 the week before, the highest weekly death toll recorded since the pandemic emerged. The week’s deaths were nearly 15 percent above the previous record of 1,296 deaths during the pandemic’s second wave in January.

After the photo of the Jacksonville woman went viral, supervisors at the site urged residents who are suffering from severe COVID-19 symptoms to seek hospitalization and oxygen therapy in hospitals for the disease. In an effort to dissuade the general public from seeking the antiviral drug, health officials have stressed that such treatments are only designed for people in the early stages of their sickness or immediately after contracting the disease.

The newest wave in the pandemic has led to a nationwide growth of such pop-up sites for monoclonal antibody therapy, a treatment that has been championed by politicians like Florida Republican governor Ron DeSantis and some health experts as effective in reducing the lethality of the virus.

Monoclonal antibodies are intended to prevent future hospitalizations and are usually administered to high-risk patients, like those with kidney disease or diabetes. They are laboratory-made proteins that were introduced last year by the biotech conglomerate Regeneron Pharmaceuticals to treat mild-to-moderate cases of COVID-19. DeSantis and other right-wing opponents of vaccines, lockdowns, social distancing and masking are touting the antiviral drug as the best solution to the health crisis.

DeSantis has held up the example of former President Donald Trump, who was treated with the Regeneron antibody cocktail while recovering from coronavirus last fall. In several recent speaking events held throughout the state, the governor has openly dismissed the superiority of taking the vaccine to trumpet Regeneron. At one event he proclaimed, “I don’t think it’s an either-or” issue of which works more efficiently. DeSantis has boosted monoclonal antibodies as a cure for the relatively large numbers of those

still unvaccinated, while he has been one of the central proponents of anti-scientific propaganda and disinformation which has fueled public skepticism over the vaccines.

Moreover, another justification put forward for promoting monoclonal treatment is the increase in vaccinated individuals who are testing positive for the virus.

What is left out is the fact that such “breakthrough” infections are only possible because the Biden White House and the Democratic Party have ruled out scientifically-guided health measures that would eradicate COVID-19 and end the pandemic--universal testing, contact tracing, the safe isolation of infected patients, the imposition of strict travel restrictions, and the shutdown of all schools and nonessential workplaces.

This is expressed in the Biden administration's push for the full reopening of schools, which serve as major vectors for rising child infections and spur community transmission.

Governor DeSantis is among the most reactionary proponents of the policy of “herd immunity” that has defined the bipartisan ruling class response to the pandemic. In May his administration codified into law a prohibition on COVID-19 vaccine passports, blocking any business or government entity from requiring proof of COVID-19 vaccination. The bill also grants the governor blanket authority to invalidate any local emergency order, even if approved by health experts, if it restricts “individual rights or liberties.”

In recent weeks DeSantis has spearheaded an anti-mask crusade against school districts statewide, enacting legislation banning district officials from authorizing mask mandates to protect students and teachers. The state government has gone so far as to threaten localities with fines and reduced funding for schools that defy the undemocratic law.

In their insistence that workers and parents return to unsafe workplaces to pump out profits for capitalism, the ruling class and its lackeys within the political establishment and corporate media are doing everything possible to promote insufficient panaceas in order to avoid taking the necessary public health measures that can save lives and halt the spread of COVID-19.

DeSantis has been among the most vocal of the promoters of the antiviral drug, which has sprung up in health facilities all across the state. In one public statement, the governor said Regeneron has “proven to radically reduce the chance that somebody ends up being hospitalized” for the virus. He called reducing hospital admissions “a top priority,” declaring further, “if you reduce those admissions, people don’t go to the hospital to begin with, you know they’re going to recover and so that’s a really important thing.”

These conceptions have elicited scathing reactions from

doctors who have highlighted the dangers in thinking treatments for COVID-19 patients should override prevention procedures such as vaccinations and masking. Dr. Leana Wen, an emergency physician and professor at George Washington University, told CNN in response to the governor’s comments, “It’s totally backwards to say that we should be focused on treatment instead of emphasizing prevention.”

Meanwhile, health officials are already warning that the efficacy of monoclonal antibody treatments is being undermined by the Delta variant.

This was spelled out by infectious disease specialist Dr. Wesley Willeford in an interview with 6 WBRC in the last month. “The problem is that the Delta variant is just different enough that these antibodies aren’t really binding the way that they need to target it,” he explained.

In fact, scores of doctors have spoken out against DeSantis to emphasize that Regeneron treatment is not a substitute for vaccinations. The treatment was promoted initially as helpful in the early phases of a patient’s positive case and effective for several weeks after infection. However, the Delta variant increased the speed at which infected patients become sick, making the window for such drugs to alleviate symptoms much shorter than previous variants.

The Delta variant, which has become the dominant strain nationwide, has proven resistant to many antibody infusion treatments. “Some of them have been pulled off the market because they are not really working the way they did early on in the pandemic,” Willeford said. Dr. Willeford stressed that without proper mitigation and prevention measures, above all vaccines along with masking, the continued spread of COVID-19 will give “more people a chance to go on and get more severe disease.”



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