

Mass outbreak in Texas schools as hospitals are overwhelmed

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An entire school district in Texas, Iraan-Sheffield ISD, was closed last Monday for two weeks amid a frightening rise in coronavirus cases in the area. Since most Texas districts reopened less than two weeks ago, schools across the state have recorded massive increases in cases, while hospitals were already filled to the brim.

On Tuesday, 199 new deaths were reported in the state, and 54,222 people have died during the pandemic as a whole. Probable cases are estimated to have already reached January 2021 levels, according to data from the Texas Department of State Health Services.

As of last week, North Texas had run out of pediatric ICU beds due to a surge in hospitalizations of children, disproving the narrative by the media and political establishment, that kids cannot fall severely ill from Covid.

Across the country, the pandemic has surged past 150,000 new cases per day, and the situation will likely become much worse as schools continue to open across the country. School reopenings have fueled surges among children in states across the country, including New Mexico, Mississippi, Georgia, California, Florida, and others.

In Iraan-Sheffield ISD, one quarter of the staff and 16 percent of students were infected or exposed to Coronavirus after just five days of classes. The school was postponed until August 30, with no virtual classes.

Iraan, a tiny oilfield town, had a population of 1,150 in 2019 according to the US Census Bureau. Out of 119 people tested in the county, 50 tested positive, a 42 percent positivity rate. Hospitals are few and far between in rural Texas, further exacerbating an already untenable situation. The single hospital in the area, Iraan General Hospital, has 14 beds, with the next closest hospital being at least 100 miles away. At least

one patient has already been airlifted out-of-state due to the massive delay in obtaining beds.

One of the most recent victims of the virus in Iraan was Sammy Balderas, who died last Thursday after being airlifted out of the town to San Angelo. His wife and 9-year-old son were quarantined, and his wife tested positive for the virus.

The lack of available hospital beds has been worsened by numerous closures and threatened closures of hospitals. A hospital in Houston which treated around 500 patients a week abruptly closed on January 18. Hundreds of rural hospitals across the country are at immediate risk of closure. Nationwide, 81 million in the US live in areas with low availability to health services.

The Medical Center Hospital, the hospital in Iraan, announced it was increasing its requests for beds from surrounding areas. “Our friends in Iraan, it almost seems like the entire town of Iraan has COVID right now. They’ve got a lot of sick folks down there,” MCH CEO Russel Tippin said. Many residents are reportedly driving themselves hundreds of miles to receive care.

In the state as a whole, the availability of ICU beds is close to non-existent, with children and adults alike filling up the hospital capacities which were already strained before the pandemic. Only 372 out of 5,788 ICU beds are available in the whole state according to the most recent government data.

Two weeks ago, before many school districts had even opened, Dallas county judge Clay Jenkins warned in a news conference on August 13 that there were “zero ICU beds left for children ... That means if your child’s in a car wreck, if your child has a congenital heart defect or something and needs an ICU bed, or more likely if they have COVID and need an ICU bed, we don’t have one. Your child will wait for another

child to die.”

Meanwhile, nurses are leaving the profession in large numbers from the severe emotional and physical strain of working during the pandemic. Approximately 23,000 registered nursing vacancies exist according to the Texas Workforce Commission.

Right-wing Texas Governor Greg Abbott, who has long championed the elimination of all public health restrictions and who has issued a statewide ban on mask mandates in schools, himself tested positive for COVID-19, despite having been vaccinated.

Since August 8, in little more than two weeks, 4,729 students and 3,373 staff have been infected with coronavirus, according to the Texas Department of State Health Services. However, these are likely significant under-counts of the true case numbers.

In Central Texas, Austin Independent School District (ISD), Round Rock ISD, Leander ISD, and Hays Consolidated Independent School District all reported 49 or more cases between August 23 and 27, with Leander and Austin reporting over 100. Significantly, in Hays County, breakthrough cases have been observed in hospitalized cases, with 11 out of the 49 people hospitalized having been vaccinated.

Only a week and a half into the school year, Conroe ISD, north of Houston in Montgomery County, reported 1,487 students and 143 employees under quarantine for suspected or confirmed infection. Houston ISD, which has a mask mandate in defiance of Abbott’s order, already has 283 confirmed cases, despite the school year only starting this Monday.

In Fort Worth ISD, 1,000 students and staff are already in quarantine, while 31 new staff cases have been reported. Other North Texas school districts which have recorded over 100 cases since the start of the school year, include Dallas ISD (which has a mask mandate), Frisco ISD, Arlington ISD and Garland ISD, the latter of which recorded a massive 386 student cases with 54 staff cases. Keller ISD recorded 23 staff cases before the semester even started as a result of the preparatory in-person sessions staff are required to attend.

In the Dallas Fort-Worth Metroplex (DFW), nearly half of all ICU beds are taken up by COVID patients, according to the DFW Hospital Council. Just 53 staffed ICU beds are available for the area, the nation’s fourth-largest metropolitan area with more than 7.6 million

people.

Governor Abbott thus far has been unable to enforce his ban on mask mandates in the face of pending litigation and widespread opposition from parents. That this arch-reactionary has been forced to postpone his provocative measures for the moment points to the fear within ruling circles of explosive levels of opposition building among teachers, parents and the working class, with polls consistently showing support for the continued closure of schools by wide majorities.

The notion that schools can be “safely reopened,” let alone that society can “live with the virus,” is a deadly lie that has been disproven by the disastrous reopenings in districts one after the other across the country. It is not possible to “live with” or “mitigate” the coronavirus; the only viable public health strategy is one of complete eradication, which public health experts explain would be possible within several weeks using an aggressive combination of vaccination and public health measures such as lockdowns.

To demand such a change in policy, teachers across the country are forming rank-and-file safety committees, independent of both big business parties and the trade unions, which have collaborated in the reopening of schools, with the heads of the AFT and NEA playing key roles cheer-leading the reopening of schools .



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