

Oxygen runs low and morgues overflow as Florida's death toll from COVID-19 continues to mount unabated

Benjamin Mateus
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As the pandemic continues to rage across the US, there has been a more than ten percent rise in new cases in the past week. Deaths are also up by a staggering 41 percent. Thursday's death toll reached 1,289 while the seven-day moving average has surpassed 1,000 for the first time since mid-March.

The US is now fast approaching 40 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 while the death toll has exceeded 650,000 according to the Worldometer coronavirus tracker. The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation has projected that based on current projections, the US can expect to see close to 740,000 COVID-19 reported deaths by December 1, 2021. There are currently more than 100,000 people hospitalized across the country with nearly 25,000 in an intensive care unit (ICU).

These statistics are unprecedented and will continue to grow worse without immediate intervention to implement basic public health measures that will eradicate the virus and stop unnecessary deaths—the closure of schools and non-essential businesses, lockdowns, mask mandates and social distancing combined with a ramped-up vaccination initiative. Scientists estimate that it would only take a few weeks to finally end the pandemic.

With every means and resource at their disposal, not one finger is being lifted by the Biden administration or by state governments to bring this pandemic to a rapid end. There is now, among every capitalist politician along the political spectrum, an open and complete disregard for the life and livelihood of the population. Death has assumed such a state of normalcy that the reporting of such statistics produces little more than a noticeable irritation on their countenance.

Such a mood is best exemplified by Republican Governor Ron DeSantis of Florida whose state is in a calamitous predicament.

Florida is registering cases at twice the rate of the entire nation with 105 cases per 100,000 people this week. This translates to more than 21,600 new cases per day. The seven-

day moving average for deaths has reached 242 with 901 deaths registered just on August 26, 2021. With such massive and rapid numbers of cases, the state's health care system and health care workers have been placed under extreme pressure.

For instance, Palm Beach County (population 1.5 million) reported on Thursday that they only had a four percent ICU capacity across its 17 hospitals. In Broward County (population 2 million), there is only three percent ICU capacity at its 16 hospitals. The patients being admitted are getting sicker in part due to the more virulent nature of the Delta variant which means many have to be placed on ventilators. Currently, 55 percent of Florida's ICUs are occupied by COVID-19 patients, a doubling of the figure from last month. By comparison, nearly one-third of the nation's ICU beds are presently filled with COVID-19 patients, which by itself represents a complete failure by the ruling establishment to contain the pandemic.

The tragic situation has been made more complex by the fact that the number of patients requiring ventilator support is climbing while there is a shortage of critical care staff to manage and treat these patients. Those that are in the hospitals are in full regalia of personal protective equipment working overtime to care for these incredibly ill patients. This week 75 doctors and hospital employees in South Florida held a news conference outside of their hospital urging people to get vaccinated and raised concern over the strains being placed on their hospital.

Dr. Scott Ross, chief medical officer at Cleveland Clinic in Weston, a suburban city in Broward County, told the *Sun Sentinel*, "The numbers of COVID patients in the ICU is increasing because patients are younger, which translates into a longer ICU stay when compared to the surge last year. We are seeing patients as young as 18 needing mechanical ventilation and patients in their 20s and 30s not surviving this virus."

Such a massive strain on hospitals also means the

overutilization of these health systems' oxygen delivery capacity. According to a Florida Hospital Association (FHA) survey released on Wednesday, they found that 68 hospitals in the state had less than 48 hours of oxygen supplies on hand. Half of these had less than 36 hours, meaning that by the end of this weekend reports of asphyxiation deaths, as have been reported in India, could surface.

Medicinal oxygen is perhaps the singularly most important treatment for those suffering from a debilitating respiratory condition that prevents their lungs from delivering the vital oxygen needed for their organs to survive. That conditions have deteriorated to such an extent that this may even be a possibility in the wealthiest country in the world exposes more than just neglect: It is cold blooded social murder.

Speaking with WFME, an NPR affiliate in Central Florida, Mary Mayhew, the president of FHA, said, "This is not like running out of masks, right? And right now, we're focused on how to make sure that does not happen. And, so, hospitals have been raising these concerns, with the state, with the division of emergency management, with the governor's office, and have raised these concerns federally."

And, yet, Governor DeSantis, rather than taking the decision to lockdown the state and ensure these healthcare systems are provided breathing space, took to Fox News this week to tout and defend his response calling his opening of treatment facilities providing COVID-19 patients with monoclonal antibodies a "great success" while resisting all efforts to close schools or institute mask mandates.

Little has been mentioned of the incestuous relationship between Citadel, a Chicago-based hedge fund which has invested in the monoclonal antibody treatment sold by Regeneron and donated more than \$10 million to DeSantis' political committee, and DeSantis' promotion of Regeneron as a preventive measure against severe COVID-19.

DeSantis has banned schools from implementing mask mandates—a minimal measure in the toolkit for fighting the pandemic—and has threatened to cut off funding from those that have chosen to do so in defiance of the law and at the behest of concerned parents and students. A possible Republican candidate for the 2024 presidential election, following President Trump's fascistic playbook, DeSantis, speaking at a news conference, said, "Those school districts are violating state law and they are overriding parents' judgment on this. If these entities are going to violate state law and take away parent's rights, obviously the way it works, there are consequences for that and there will continue to be more."

Several hospitals in Central Florida belonging to AdventHealth are turning to renting mobile morgues to keep bodies of the deceased in coolers as they have surpassed their hospital's capacity. Hospital health officials have

called the governor's office asking for assistance through a disaster declaration. No word has come back, according to *Newsweek*. WTVF-9, a local news station, released an email from AdventHealth which noted, "We have begun utilizing rented, refrigerated coolers at ten of our campuses throughout Orange, Osceola, Polk, Seminole, and Volusia counties. These coolers are quickly becoming filled."

The response by DeSantis to the pandemic is not new nor even the most exaggerated expression of the psychopathic behavior that has marked the ruling elites' response to the global pandemic. He is in essence repeating Prime Minister Boris Johnson's profanity, "No more f***ing lockdowns, let the bodies pile high in their thousands." Schools will remain open regardless of how many students, teachers and staff are sickened and die or if children pass the virus to their parents who may perish leaving them orphans so that businesses can remain open to generate record profits at the expense of the working class.

DeSantis' murderous stand in defense of corporate profit should be a warning to Florida's population that the health care system is most likely in dire straits without intervention by the working class. Needless deaths will mount as emergencies completely unrelated to COVID-19 will occur simply due to lack of healthcare capacity, whether it be a stroke, heart attack, or motor vehicle accident.

Educators, parents, autoworkers, logistics workers, health care workers and the entire working class internationally must take action to stop the pandemic and save lives and take up the fight for the eradication of COVID-19. This will require the immediate closure of schools and non-essential businesses, with full compensation for workers and small businesses owners, until transmission of the virus is halted and COVID-19 is eliminated as a threat to humanity.



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