

Growing opposition among US students, parents and educators as infections and deaths soar

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In the six weeks since schools began reopening across the United States in late July, the severity of the Delta variant in children has been made entirely clear as cases, hospitalizations, and deaths surge. According to a weekly report from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), there were 203,962 official new cases among children for the week ending August 26, a 500 percent increase since July 22 when cases were around 38,000. Mississippi and Hawaii currently have the highest infection rates among children, representing over 25 percent of all cases in their respective states.

The report also shows that at least 425 child deaths have been reported since March 2020, with 76 deaths occurring since July 22. It must be noted that Michigan, Rhode Island, Montana, most of New York and South Carolina are not reporting age distributions of COVID-19 deaths, indicating an undercount of the data.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently reported that there has been an 11.5 percent increase this week in child hospitalizations, with a current seven-day average of 360 pediatric patients admitted into hospitals across the US. In total, there have been 53,474 hospitalizations among youth since August 1, 2020, according to the CDC.

Amid the current surge, children's hospitals across the US are currently at or near the brink of capacity. Doctors are warning of an influx of child multi-system inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C) patients in the coming weeks. There have officially been a total of 4,404 MIS-C cases and 37 deaths since the start of the pandemic. As symptoms of MIS-C usually occur four to six weeks after infection, reports of diagnoses often come after rises in COVID-19 cases.

Educators and school staff have also not been spared from this tragedy as infections and deaths continue to rise. With no comprehensive aggregated data available to the public on educator deaths, reports have been patched together by concerned individuals which provide a glimpse of the immense amount of death that has resulted from the reopening of schools. The Twitter account, "School Personnel Lost to Covid," (@LostToCovid) aggregates confirmed deaths of educators and staff through local news media and notes that at

least 1,600 active and retired K-12 educators and personnel have died of COVID-19.

The account also notes that at least 181 school personnel have died since July 1, 2021. This does not include the recent deaths of fifteen teachers and staff in Miami-Dade County Public Schools, two Indian River County district teachers in Florida and two teachers at Connally Junior High School district in Waco, Texas.

Tens of thousands of students and staff have been quarantined in recent weeks due to infections or possible exposure to the virus. In Mississippi alone, over 24,000 students and staff are in quarantine after COVID-19 exposure from August 23-27. Nearly 4,000 K-12 students tested positive last week in the state.

The surge in cases has also resulted in partial, short-term school closures across the US. According to a school closures tracker released by the news outlet District Administration, at least 20 states have reported multiple school closures due to high infection rates. This includes entire school districts in Tennessee, Georgia and Texas.

Despite mass increases in cases, many major districts have remained open, citing "mitigation measures" as a supposed means to keep students safe. These measures, often consisting of mask mandates, limited testing and some improved ventilation, are entirely inadequate and are already resulting in mass infections in many districts.

In California, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the second largest in the country with over 600,000 students, has had at least 5,936 reported COVID-19 cases among students and staff since schools reopened two weeks ago on August 16. According to the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, 5,207 infections were identified among students and 729 cases among school staff between August 15 and 29.

LAUSD has been hailed as one of the "safest" districts due to its mandatory weekly testing program and other mitigation measures. Given the current infection rate in the district and high transmission rates in LA county, mitigations in place within the district have proven to be inadequate and unable to

be fully enforced. Weekly testing has not been consistent within the district, and the fact that there is an 18-72 hour period in which an infected individual can shed virus and not produce a positive test, will result in large numbers of infected students going undetected. Additionally, only close contacts are asked to quarantine, and if an individual is vaccinated, they do not have to quarantine, despite the fact that vaccinated people can still be infectious.

Chicago Public Schools (CPS), the third largest district in the US with over 300,000 students, reopened last Monday and is already seeing cases in schools. Additionally, the district had promised concerned parents and staff that they would implement a large-scale plan for weekly COVID-19 testing of all students and staff, but district officials announced Thursday that the program will not operate at full capacity until a few weeks into the school year.

Opposition is growing in response to the catastrophic conditions in the schools among students, parents and school staff. On Thursday, Bessemer City High School students in Bessemer, Alabama, staged a protest against the continuing demand that they learn in-person after dozens of students have tested positive for COVID-19 in the school district. The protest prompted officials to temporarily switch to remote learning on Friday, with plans for next week not determined as of this writing.

In Hawaii, parents have organized a “Mass Student Stay at Home Movement” to keep their children home indefinitely due to significant safety concerns in the schools and mass infections.

In Tennessee, parents from Knox County Schools have also organized a sickout and protest this week to keep students safe. On August 27, more than 8,600 students were absent due to quarantine for COVID-19 infection or exposure.

A recent promotional video from the Tennessee Department of Education praising the reopening of schools in the state has received major opposition from parents. In the video, education commissioner Penny Schwinn grotesquely states, “The smell of new books, clean hallways, the energy and feeling of being back in classrooms with their friends and their teachers. It’s such a special time, and I am so excited for our state.”

Multiple protests have been organized across the US by parents in opposition to inadequate levels of mitigations in schools, including mask mandates and social distancing. Additionally, school employees have recently expressed opposition to unsafe working conditions.

In Georgia, over 50 Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools System (SCCPSS) bus drivers went on strike last Friday over safety concerns and low pay. In Chicago, 73 CPS bus drivers quit last Friday over the same concerns, resulting in a 500-driver shortage for the start of the school year Monday. Over 2,100 CPS students did not have a ride to school Monday and the district has been providing families with a \$500-\$1,000 stipend to call Lyft or Uber to take their children to school.

Bus drivers are a section of the workforce particularly hard hit by the dangers of the pandemic as they have been subjected to dangerously overcrowded and enclosed spaces on top of staggeringly low pay. The Twitter account @LostToCovid has reported that at least 171 school bus drivers have died during the pandemic. Just last week, two Texas bus drivers and one Florida bus driver succumbed to the virus. Phyllis LeFlore, president of the AFSCME Local 1184 in Miami-Dade, Florida, told local media, “We’re losing, what, about seven employees a week to COVID. Now everybody is getting scared.”

The line of the entire political establishment and ruling elite in response to the pandemic continues to be to enforce the policy of herd immunity on the population for the sake of profits. Recognizing the immense opposition to the current conditions resulting from the callous reopening of schools and businesses, the ruling elite is now promoting inadequate “mitigation” measures as a guise to keep schools open and enforce herd immunity. Politicians, district officials, and union bureaucrats across the US are knowingly throwing children and staff into deadly classrooms.

Not a single additional death of a child or school employee is acceptable! The only viable strategy is for the eradication of the virus, based on the policies advanced by the leading scientists, and epidemiologists.

Eradication entails the universal deployment of every weapon in the arsenal of measures to combat COVID-19 to stamp out the virus once and for all. This involves the closure of all schools and nonessential businesses, and the provision of full financial assistance to all affected workers and small business owners. Mass vaccinations, mask mandates, universal testing, contact tracing, isolation of infected patients and other measures must be implemented in every country.

Parents, educators, school staff and students across the US and beyond must oppose the reopening of schools as part of a globally coordinated struggle of the working class to eradicate COVID-19.



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