More than 1 in 500 people in the US have died from COVID-19

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Numerous media reports have emerged noting the latest macabre milestone of the coronavirus pandemic, that COVID-19 has killed more than one out of every 500 people in the United States since the virus first emerged in the country in January 2020. The total tally currently stands at 42.5 million confirmed cases and more than 685,000 dead.

The last such milestone occurred in mid-December of last year, when one out of every 1,000 people in the population had died. Nine months later, the number of deaths has doubled. Virtually everyone now knows a friend, colleague or family member lost to the deadly contagion.

In marking the premature passing of so many lives, CNN noted that, "It's a sobering toll that comes as hospitals in the US are struggling to keep up with the volume of patients." An age breakdown in the *Washington Post* revealed that those aged 40-64 have a death rate of 1 in 780 and those aged 65-84 have a death rate of 1 in 150. Those aged 85 and older have a truly staggering death rate of 1 in 35, amounting to a total of 171,000 lost human lives.

The pandemic has ravaged both the elderly as well as those caring for them. The AARP Nursing Home COVID-19 Dashboard reports that, as of September 15, at least 186,000 nursing home residents and staff have been killed by the pandemic. AARP's data implies that tens of thousands of nursing home and long-term care facility workers have died alongside those they were working to care for. Nursing home deaths are also on the rise, particularly in Alaska, Florida and Montana.

Comparisons to wars and past pandemics are increasingly apt. In absolute numbers, the COVID-19 pandemic has killed more Americans than total US combat and non-combat deaths in World War I and II combined. The coronavirus pandemic has also now killed about the same number of Americans as the 1918 flu pandemic, which killed an estimated 500,000 to 850,000.

There are also many indications that the coronavirus pandemic will surpass or has already surpassed the grim milestone set by the 1918 flu. Excess death estimates from the *Economist* place the true death toll in the US closer to 900,000, while the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation place the total toll from COVID-19 at more than 1 million.

Official figures are equally macabre. There are currently an average of more than 1,600 people dying each day, a number which has been trending upwards since July.

What none of the media reports seriously probe, however, is the source of the immense amount of casualties. At most, there is a despair that "not enough people have been immunized" with coronavirus vaccines, as put by the *Post*. The Biden administration itself has remained silent on the figure. More generally, the deaths have been treated as "no longer a matter of if … but a matter of when" they would occur, as if the pandemic is some sort of unforeseen natural disaster and that we must simply accept the consequences.

Instead, the decreasing cases were seen as an excuse to more fully open the economy. July 4 was celebrated as a day of "Independence" from the virus and plans were made to fully reopen schools come the fall. Warnings of numerous scientists about the dangers of a surge of the new and highly infectious Delta variant, which had ravaged India for months, went totally unheeded. Decisions were made to prioritize the interests of Wall Street investors over human life.

The consequences have been catastrophic. There are now nearly 153,000 new cases reported daily in the US, a figure which is again rising after the dip in reporting

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over the Labor Day weekend. Cases are also increasing across all parts of the US, not just the American south where cases have been concentrated over the past few months. Data from the *New York Times* shows that states including Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia, Alaska, Montana, Wyoming and Idaho have some of the highest case rates in the nation.

Montana and Idaho also have some of the highest increases in hospitalizations in the country. Montana leads the entire nation, with a 47 percent increase in hospitalizations over the past 14 days, while Idaho has suffered a 29 percent increase over that same period. Other states with similar high changes to their hospitalization rates include Ohio, West Virginia, Alaska, New Hampshire and Pennsylvania.

As a result, hospital systems are increasingly overwhelmed. Nearly 100,000 people are hospitalized from COVID-19 on a given day. One in four hospitals currently reports that more than 95 percent of their intensive care unit beds are occupied, and there is at least one such overwhelmed hospital in nearly every state. And many hospitals, such as those in southern Illinois and southwest Montana, have reported zero ICU bed availability.

The surge in cases, hospitalizations and deaths since mid-summer is a damning indictment of the policies of the Biden administration. Since he took office, Biden has banked on vaccines being enough to slow the spread of the disease, promoting the false claim that it was safe to reopen workplaces and particularly schools since February. Other public health measures, including testing, contact tracing and isolation have been largely abandoned. Closures of businesses and schools have been rejected outright.

In doing so, Biden has adopted the policies of his predecessor and the entire US ruling establishment. While the media and various other representatives of the capitalist class may momentarily note the scale of the ongoing disaster, no solution, especially not one which impinges on the profit interests of the banks and corporate elite, is presented.

It thus falls upon the other major social force in society, the working class, to fight for a policy of eradicating COVID-19. This requires the closure of schools and non-essential businesses, together with massive investments in testing, contact tracing, and other vital public health measures.

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