

San Diego State University students speak out against inadequate COVID-19 safety measures on campus

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The reopening of K-12 schools this fall has produced a dramatic and inexcusable increase in infections among children and young people, with three children now dying of COVID-19 every day in the United States.

Schools are particularly potent vectors for infection, as COVID-19 is more transmissible among unvaccinated, asymptomatic children. With the cross-section of teachers, children and parents from various workplaces and communities themselves, schools play a central role in the community spread of COVID-19. This pattern is reflected at universities on an even greater scale, considering that student populations number in the tens of thousands.

San Diego State University (SDSU) was home to one of the largest COVID-19 outbreaks in the United States last year before universities were forced to move online during the spring. SDSU was the site of more than 1,300 cases, occurring as the university had a “hybrid-model,” where most classes were online yet the campus and dorms were still full of students and staff.

The current situation at SDSU, like many US universities, forewarns of a serious spread of the virus among students, staff and the wider community. With the university now offering only in-person classes, students are packed into classrooms and public spaces with no physical distancing, improved ventilation and sanitation, or any other proven methods of prevention aside from mask wearing, as they are seated within inches of each other in their classes.

Students at the campus spoke to the WSWS this week, voicing their concerns and highlighting the dangerous conditions that students face across the United States.

Ben, a graduate student, explained to the WSWS that classrooms are “packed to the brim just like pre-pandemic [classrooms]” and that it is left to the discretion of instructors for how well masking is enforced during class. Outside of class, Ben explained that “*no one* wears a mask as soon as they step outside a building ... and students are crowded into spaces to commute.”

In public spaces like the gym, where hundreds of students spend time every day, masking is not enforced. When asked if he felt safe on campus, Ben offered a resounding “absolutely f***ing not.”

Manuel, a senior at SDSU, said, “There is no enforcement of the [COVID] rules whatsoever.” Like Ben, Manuel explained that there are no distancing measures on campus, and masking is optional in nearly all settings. “Knowing that there is an increasing risk, I feel like the school should be more responsible in protecting students by actually trying to enforce their own rules,” he added.

Erick, another graduate student, said that the rules “feel like they were a minimum that [SDSU administration] had to provide. ... If they actually cared, every class would have the option of being hybrid rather than force students on campus.” Like many other students, he said he felt the university leadership was largely leaving students and staff to their own devices, while giving them no truly safe or even relatively safe option.

Another student, who wished to remain anonymous, is a freshman at SDSU living in a dorm with roommates this semester. The student described being particularly anxious about the spread of the Delta variant on campus. Echoing the concern of many other

students, she explained that SDSU's rules "seemed like they're just for show."

She went on to describe the lack of sanitation and ventilation measures in classrooms, the lack of social distancing and the weak masking rules on campus. She relayed a serious concern that the sheer volume and closeness of students on campus itself is a great danger. The student predicted that "at this rate, we may be sent home soon" due to a growing number of cases on campus.

SDSU currently lists 187 confirmed cases from its campus. The university's list of "potential exposures" includes exposures in more than 90 different courses, many of which have several different "dates of potential exposures," each within days of each other. Nearly every non-classroom building also has listed potential exposures.

The SDSU library by far has the most "potential exposures," documenting almost two weeks in a row now where students at the library were potentially exposed to COVID-19 every day. The university does not actively communicate to the student body that there are potential exposures every day. Instead, they intentionally downplay and cover over the information.

The same student also spoke at length about her safety in the dorms. Similar to last fall, SDSU has gone to great lengths to get as many students in dormitories as possible, as the on-campus living fees are the university's financial lifeblood. Students are crammed into dorms with as many as three students in a bedroom at a time for more than \$10,000 each.

This effort has, once again, produced a catastrophe. The freshman spoke to the WSWS about her concerns having a roommate that is unvaccinated. She explained that the university did not notify her of the risk, despite its obvious relevance to her personal health and safety. She has since put in a request with the housing department at SDSU to change rooms for her own safety.

The student also made a Reddit post on a forum popular with SDSU students seeking advice. The post received a great deal of engagement from fellow students, who criticized SDSU leadership for neglecting her safety. One student commented, "This is just wrong. SDSU should be ashamed for allowing this."

SDSU, like most universities and institutions across

the United States, is knowingly putting the health of its students and workers at risk for the sake of profit. The mitigation of COVID-19 has largely been taken up by the working class, forced upon them as "personal responsibility" measures, rather than the systematic, large-scale efforts required to actually eliminate and eradicate the virus.

The university bureaucracy does not provide rules or enforcement measures that would ensure a safe campus, let alone effectively communicate to students when their health might be put in danger by a positive COVID-19 individual in their classroom, dorm, or shared spaces, as contact tracing and general communication are not being carried out effectively.

The willing negligence of the administration is entirely to blame for the looming disaster in the community. Any attempt to blame student parties, the inconsistency of mask wearing, or even an unvaccinated student misses the social reality of the situation: This is not a question of personal responsibility, but instead is the responsibility of these institutions and administrations with vast financial resources who are intentionally putting students at risk by not enforcing COVID-19 precautions.

The resources exist to eradicate the virus and save lives, but instead the ruling class is condemning the working class to death and disease to maintain its profits. The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at SDSU calls for the eradication of COVID-19, which requires a global strategy and the use of all public health measures including lockdowns, the closure of all schools and non-essential workplaces, and an effective international vaccine distribution.

Science and technology exist to drive new cases down to zero, not just in individual countries but across the globe. Such an eradication strategy can only be fought for by the international working class and youth. We encourage all students to get involved with the IYSSE in your area and contact us today.



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