

As schools reopen in Massachusetts, 2,500 COVID cases reported among students and staff in one week

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30 September 2021

As schools in Massachusetts fully reopened earlier this month, infections occurring in K-12 schools across the state are rising. Data on school infections show a staggering 1,230 cases among students from September 13-15, the first three days that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) began reporting that information, with a further 190 infections reported among school staff. The following week of September 16-22 saw the numbers rise to 2,236 cases in students and 318 in staff.

These figures represent only the cases voluntarily reported to DESE by school districts and are surely an undercount. Despite the high rate of infections, the state is demanding that all schools stay open for fully in-person learning, with no remote option offered to families. The administration of Republican Governor Charlie Baker is determined to keep schools open, dispensing with even the most basic mitigation measures.

Critical public health measures, including testing and quarantining most close contacts found to have been in proximity to someone who contracted COVID-19, have been abandoned. Students considered to be close contacts will no longer be tested and will continue to attend school, as long as they were vaccinated, wearing a mask, or outside with or without a mask at the time of exposure.

After October 15, 2021, if a school demonstrates a vaccination rate of 80 percent or more of students and staff in the school, those who are vaccinated will no longer be subject to the DESE mask requirement. Additionally, a “test and stay” model, in which the remaining small percentage of close contacts who do qualify for testing remain in school, so long as they test negative, is being implemented by many school districts.

Considering the inadequate ventilation systems of most schools and the ability for those who are vaccinated to

contract and spread the highly contagious Delta variant both indoors and outside, a large percentage of the approximately 920,000 school children and 140,000 school staff and their families face the prospect of contracting this debilitating and potentially lethal virus.

Already, the two-week positive case number in children ages 5-19 has more than doubled in the past five weeks, from 2,731 as of August 20, to at least 5,668 today. This will also greatly affect the community at large, as a recent study in *Nature* shows that school closures were the most effective Non-Pharmaceutical Intervention (NPI) in reducing the reproduction rate of COVID-19.

The homicidal policy being implemented from the highest levels of government is being pursued in close coordination with the teachers’ unions, under the cover of the pseudo-scientific lies that children are safe from COVID-19 or are unlikely to catch and spread the virus. The proponents of these ideas feign concern for children’s emotional and educational well-being, avoiding mention of how children are affected by the debilitating effects of Long COVID, the death of a parent or family member, or the more than 480 children who have already died from the disease in the US.

The Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA) website prominently displays a quote from MTA President Merrie Najimy, stating, “our top priority is to get our schools open safely and keep them open for full in-person learning.”

Meanwhile, Governor Baker acts as if vaccinations alone have ended the public health emergency, recently stating, “When you have five million people at this point in time in Massachusetts who are basically vaccinated you can’t count cases anymore and assume that means hospitalizations and deaths.”

Baker absurdly omits the fact that children under 12 are

not yet eligible for the vaccine. His assertion that “the vaccines work” is belied by the growing number of breakthrough infections among the vaccinated population in Massachusetts and nationwide. In one recent example, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), with a vaccination rate over 98 percent, had more positive cases in the first week of September than the entire month of September last academic year, with 40 cases reported that week alone.

At least 217 people who were fully vaccinated in Massachusetts have died from COVID-19, while over 35 percent of hospitalized patients in the state are themselves fully vaccinated. One recent study among nurses in Israel found that roughly 20 percent of those with breakthrough infections developed Long COVID, a rate just as high as those who are unvaccinated. A study published in June in the *Nature Medicine Journal* showed that 52 percent of young adults (16-30) with COVID-19 who did not end up hospitalized had Long COVID symptoms six months later, including loss of taste and/or smell (28 percent), fatigue (21 percent), dyspnea (13 percent), impaired concentration (13 percent) and memory problems (11 percent).

Despite the state’s best efforts to cover up the deadly consequences of its reckless policies, a crisis in K-12 schools is coming into full public view, with mass infections and critical shortages of school staff recently exposed in local news outlets and social media.

The ongoing shortage of bus drivers, many of whom have quit over safety conditions and dismal pay, is taking place throughout Massachusetts as part of a broader national trend. As the WSWS reported on September 14, the National Association for Pupil Transportation recently conducted a national survey which found that over half of the school transportation officials who participated reported “severe” or “desperate” bus driver shortages, and nearly two-thirds stated that the driver shortage is currently their number one challenge. Even the few districts that said they were not short of regular drivers reported not having enough drivers to address COVID-19 quarantines and the wave of retirements.

Baker has activated 250 National Guard members to transport students in a desperate bid to shore up his back-to-school drive. However, this measure is having a marginal impact on the crisis. In one instance, an elementary school in the town of Farmington closed during the first week of September due to a COVID-19 outbreak in the district, suspending busing service to Great Barrington and Lee, leaving parents in those

districts desperate for alternative transportation to continue going to work. A recent report in the *Boston Globe* showed that two weeks after the start of the school year, some students are arriving up to five hours late, if they are even picked up at all.

In one comment posted in a Facebook group of concerned teachers and parents, an educator wrote, “[State Education Commissioner] Jeff Riley and Charlie Baker would personally drown every child in the state, if their rich benefactors told them to. No amount of suffering or death will make these psychopaths do anything to protect children.”

A large percentage of the children infected now face the debilitating prospect of long-term neurological symptoms, including brain fog, fatigue and memory loss. The task of ending this nightmare is left to teachers, parents and workers in every industry who now find themselves in the state’s crosshairs and at the behest of the ruling class, which depends on the extraction of profit from workers and the continued inflation of the stock market. Only the working class can intervene to end these crimes and fight for an eradication strategy to end the pandemic. This requires a break with the political representatives of the ruling class, and the bureaucratic, corporatist labor unions that enable the government to openly pursue and implement these policies.

We call on all workers to form independent rank-and-file committees to discuss, develop and link up across industrial and national lines to coordinate the fight to end the pandemic. Contact us today to build a committee at your school, workplace or in your neighborhood.



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