

# Four children die from COVID-19 in one week in Southern US after schools fully reopen

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Four public school students from the Southern United States died from COVID-19-related causes over the past week, highlighting the deadly consequences of school reopenings. Two Mississippi children between the ages of 11-17 died on the same day, bringing the state's total pediatric COVID-19 fatalities to nine; two Virginia elementary school children, ages 10 and under, died within days of each other.

These deaths occur against a backdrop of a global crisis in pediatric health, as well as mounting resistance to school reopenings from parents and educators worldwide. Last Friday, October 1, saw thousands of parents, educators and workers join a global school strike in opposition to the homicidal school reopening policies that have infected millions of children and killed thousands worldwide.

On September 22, 16-year-old Landon Woodson of North Mississippi was taken by ambulance to a regional hospital. The next day, his mother, Tracie Young, posted two photos of him on Facebook—one in his North Pontotoc High School football uniform, another on a ventilator in the hospital—saying he had “always been healthy until COVID-19.”

“Please Please Get Vaccinated,” Young implored in her post. Two days later, Woodson suffered from cardiac arrest and died in Memphis Children's Hospital.

On the same day that Woodson died, the Mississippi State Department of Health reported the death of another school-aged child between the ages of 11-17. A total of nine Mississippi children have now died of COVID-19; all but one death occurred this year.

On Monday, September 27, 10-year-old Teresa Sperry of eastern Virginia died of COVID-19 after developing severe symptoms on Sunday. After a chest scan was deemed “clear,” Sentara Obici Hospital sent her home on Sunday evening. The next day, she stopped breathing; she was sent back to Sentara Obici before being transferred to Children's Hospital of The King's Daughters in Norfolk, where she died.

Teresa's mother, third grade teacher Nicole Sperry, posted on Facebook that her daughter had been made to walk sick children from her class to the clinic at Hillpoint Elementary School in Suffolk County. Suffolk Public Schools

Superintendent John B. Gordon III wrote a community-wide letter on Wednesday, announcing Teresa's death and urging school students to wash their hands regularly and to avoid touching their eyes, mouths and noses.

Nicole Sperry denounced Gordon's statement as a “sorry excuse of a letter.”

Sperry's death was followed two days later by that of a younger, unnamed child in Eastern Virginia. More than 1,000 children in the state have been hospitalized due to COVID-19, and 12 of the 13 juvenile COVID-19 deaths in the state have occurred in 2021.

Pediatric COVID-19 deaths have surged throughout the southeastern region of the United States since the beginning of the 2021-22 school year. In Mississippi, 13-year-old Mkayla Robinson died on August 14, less than two weeks after school reopened. Robinson was Mississippi's fifth pediatric COVID-19 death. Children's Hospital of The King's Daughters, where Teresa Sperry breathed her last, reported more pediatric COVID-19 cases in September than in any month since the beginning of the pandemic.

The region ranks at the very bottom of national averages for vaccination. Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama and Louisiana continue to see vaccination rates well below 50 percent. Each of these states has pursued the “herd immunity” strategy of letting the virus spread uncontrolled, with devastating consequences.

The Pontotoc School District of Mississippi, where Landon Woodson was a student, opened with no mask mandate in place, only to put one into effect when state COVID-19 cases began to rise. The district allowed the mandate to expire on September 17.

In Virginia, masks have been required since the beginning of the school year. Yet school administrators have used the false sense of security provided by masking to enact absurd quarantine and reporting policies, with students coming within three feet of an infected individual “excluded from the definition of close contact and not required to quarantine” as long as masks are worn.

In Cobb County, Georgia, the Cobb County Board of

Education allowed Vice Chairman David Banks to use his official Board of Education email account to spam district parents with emails saying, among other things: “Those pushing the use of masks DO NOT KNOW what they are talking about.”

When a parent responded with a bullet-point list contesting and debunking the claims, Banks responded, “Nothing has been debunked. This is in your head.”

Significantly, at a September 14 Georgia Department of Public Health Board meeting, state epidemiologist Dr. Cherie Drenzek reported that around 60 percent of all COVID-19 outbreaks in the state occur in K-12 schools. She stated that cases among school children increased dramatically with the reopening of schools, with four children statewide dying in August.

Georgia’s children are not the only ones dying from COVID-19. More than 45 teachers and professional staff have died in the state since the school year began. On August 30, 51-year-old teacher Sean Hammond of North Georgia died. His wife, Heidi, age 44, was hospitalized for COVID-19 around the same time; she died in the hospital on September 24. Throughout the state, at least 13 school bus drivers have died of coronavirus since the beginning of the school year.

There can be no doubt that school reopenings are driving these deaths. The phenomenon is not limited to the Southern United States. Worldwide, pediatric COVID-19 cases have spiked sharply since the beginning of the year. The highest number of pediatric COVID-19 deaths occurred in Brazil, where 1,518 people between the ages of 10 and 19 died of the virus in the first half of 2021. Another 1,187 children under age 10 have died of COVID-19 in Brazil since the pandemic began.

In Indonesia, over 700 children died of COVID-19 in July alone, at a rate of more than 100 per week. During the week of July 12 alone, at least 150 children died, half of whom were under the age of five.

In the United Kingdom, around 40 children are admitted to hospital daily for COVID-19-related illness, and most schools reopened with no mask mandates or social distancing whatsoever. A parent using the hashtag #SafeEdForAll reported on October 3 that a child at her son’s school died the week prior, yet the school is “carrying on as normal,” she said, and had not re-instituted the mask mandate.

These losses are only the beginning of an unfolding tragedy with an as yet unknown scope. The long-term consequences of COVID-19 infection in the pediatric population are not yet well understood. Researchers from the US and the UK estimate that tens or hundreds of thousands of children have or will suffer long-term sequelae after COVID-19 infection, with repercussions ranging from fatigue to complete short-term memory loss. Cognitive deficiencies, with a loss of between two and seven IQ points in the most severe cases, have been reported. Currently, there is little known about how permanent these losses are, but a loss of two IQ points is about equal to the

damage done by lead poisoning, and a loss of seven IQ points is roughly equal to the damage done by a stroke.

The reopening of schools represents a deadly social experiment when so little is known about the long-term effects of the virus. Vaccinations alone cannot mitigate these effects on the pediatric population; children under 12 are not eligible for the vaccine at this time.

This social experiment is meeting with ever greater opposition worldwide. In the UK, an October 1 school strike called by parent Lisa Diaz of #SafeEdForAll, met with international support. Thousands of messages poured in from social media users in the United States, France, Germany, Sri Lanka, Japan and many other countries. Throughout the week leading up to and including the strike, hundreds of thousands of people viewed tweets with the primary hashtag for the event, #SchoolStrike2021. There were over 26,000 tweets with this hashtag, including more than 11,000 on October 1 alone when it was trending for hours.

In a video posted to Twitter on October 3 commenting on the event, Diaz stated, “From the bottom of my heart, thank you. It’s good to know that I’m not the only person who feels like this; that our children shouldn’t be collateral damage, that it’s not OK just to let COVID-19 rip in schools, because it’s a novel virus of which we have no idea of the long-term effects.”

She added, “Ten children died in the UK in September alone. I can’t imagine the pain; you would never ever get over the death of a child, and yet three children on average are dying a day in the States. It’s not acceptable ... we will keep on going, because we’ve no other choice, we can’t let this happen.”

Only by eradicating COVID-19 can we guarantee children a bright and healthy future. Parents, educators and other workers worldwide must continue to demand nothing short of eradication. Movements such as the October 1 school strike must be expanded, and rank-and-file safety committees of parents and teachers must continue to be built to fight for the measures necessary to stop the pandemic and save lives.



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