

Over 140,000 US children have lost a parent or caregiver to COVID-19

Evan Blake
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A study released Thursday in the journal *Pediatrics* found that “from April 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021, over 140,000 children in the US experienced the death of a parent or grandparent caregiver” due to COVID-19. The results follow the July release of a study in *The Lancet* by the same lead author, Dr. Susan Hillis, which estimated that the same figure globally stood at 1.56 million children through the end of April 2021.

These staggering figures underscore the immense scale of the tragedy that has swept across the globe during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the US, nearly one in four of the 621,656 deaths from COVID-19 by June 30 were those of parents or caregivers to children.

The latest study notes, “the lives of these children are permanently changed by the deaths of their mothers, fathers, or grandparents who provided their homes, needs, and care,” adding, “Loss of parents is associated with mental health problems, shorter schooling, lower self-esteem, sexual risk behaviors, and risks of suicide, violence, sexual abuse, and exploitation. Loss of co-residing grandparents can impact psycho-social, practical, and/or financial support for grandchildren. After a caregiver’s death, family circumstances may change, and children may face housing instability, separations, and lack of nurturing support.”

The level of trauma inflicted on an entire generation of young people is unfathomable. While the ruling elite and their media endlessly repeat the mantra that everyone must “learn to live with the virus,” in reality more and more families are being ripped apart as nearly 7,000 people continue to die from COVID-19 worldwide each day.

Every child’s needless loss of a parent is a life-altering event, the vast majority of which have not been written on or covered by the corporate media. Some of

those which have been covered offer a glimpse into the social crisis confronting these youth.

In late August, five children from Yucaipa, California, were orphaned after both their parents, Davy and Daniel Macias, died from COVID-19 in the same week. Their entire family was infected with the virus during a vacation, with the children recovering but their parents becoming steadily more ill. The children, with the eldest only 7 years old, now live with their grandparents. Terry Seri, Daniel Macias’s sister-in-law, told local press that they “spend a lot of time at night looking for mom and dad.”

Also in August, in Mississippi, a 32-year-old mother of a newborn child died from COVID-19 only months after her husband succumbed to the virus, leaving the baby girl orphaned. In neighboring Alabama, a single mother of seven is now raising 12 children on her own after her sister and brother-in-law died from COVID-19 in the same month, orphaning their five children. In Michigan, seven children were orphaned in early September after their mother, Charletta Green, died from COVID-19, and their father Troy, who also had COVID-19, died from a heart attack that began shortly after he learned that his wife was taking a turn for the worse.

Given the lack of comprehensive testing and contact tracing, there is no way to measure the precise number of infections that have been caused by the reopening of schools before COVID-19 was contained. However, multiple studies and analyses of government data have shown strong correlations between school reopenings and surges of the virus in their surrounding communities. Undoubtedly, a substantial number of the parents and caregivers who have died from COVID-19 were infected by their children who had been compelled to return to unsafe schools.

Capitalist politicians throughout the world have pushed to reopen schools by cynically professing their concern for the mental health and well-being of children who struggled with remote learning. In reality, school reopenings were always driven by the needs of the corporations to have parents back at work producing profits. Just as these same politicians continuously cut education and social spending and never cared about the well-being of children before the pandemic, so, today, they have no concern for the mental health of millions of children whose parents and caregivers have died from COVID-19.

There is enormous opposition within the international working class to the pandemic policies implemented by the ruling elites, and a growing desire to fight for the eradication of COVID-19 worldwide. This found powerful expression in the October 1 global school strike initiated by British parent Lisa Diaz. Throughout the week leading up to and including October 1, the primary hashtag for the event—[#SchoolStrike2021](#)—was used over 26,000 times in dozens of countries around the world.

Asked about the studies on children who have lost parents and caregivers to COVID-19, Diaz told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “The governments and those who need us to keep working go on and on about mental health. But there’s a severe risk of the parents dying, which will have a far greater impact on children’s mental health than remote learning for a couple months. These children now have to live with the thought that they might have accidentally killed their parents. If schools can’t be open and safe, if there’s going to be any kind of transmission in schools, they need to be shut down.”

In addition to the loss of their parents and loved ones, children themselves can be severely impacted and die from COVID-19. Recent studies indicate that roughly one in seven infected children develops Long COVID, suffering debilitating symptoms months after infection. Last week, 22 children died from the virus in the US, bringing the cumulative pediatric death toll to 520. COVID-19 is now the leading cause of death among children in Brazil, with 1,518 children ages 10-19 dying from the virus in the first half of 2021. During a major surge of the Delta variant in Indonesia this summer, over 700 children died from COVID-19 in July alone.

It is no exaggeration to state that the future of an entire generation now hangs in the balance. If the strategies of “herd immunity” or its variant of enacting limited mitigation measures remain dominant worldwide, COVID-19 will continue to spread through schools, factories and other workplaces, with millions more people dying and masses of children scarred for life.

The only scientifically-grounded and viable strategy for putting an end to this needless suffering and death is one which aims at the global eradication of COVID-19. This entails a globally-coordinated vaccination program, mass testing, contact tracing, the safe isolation of infected patients, masking and the deployment of all other public health measures in every country. Wherever the virus is spreading, schools and nonessential workplaces must be temporarily closed until daily new cases are brought to zero, with workers and small business people guaranteed full income protection during lock-downs.

Outlining the scientific basis for these measures and how they can be implemented will be the central focus of the October 24 meeting organized by the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, “How to end the pandemic: The case for eradication.” A panel of distinguished scientists and workers will review the present state of the pandemic and chart a course to eradicate COVID-19 worldwide. All those who wish to fight for this program to save lives should register today, invite your coworkers, friends and family, and share the event widely across social media.



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