

Coronavirus continues to surge in Northwestern US

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18 October 2021

Coronavirus cases remain high across the United States, including more than 78,000 new cases a day and at least 1,300 daily deaths. Cases have, in particular, been surging in Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Oregon and Washington since August, with a corresponding rise in hospitalizations and deaths.

Similar to the growth in cases nationally, Northwest US has been hit by a combination of the emergence of the Delta variant of the coronavirus and the reckless policies of school and workplace reopenings by the Biden administration. There were less than 750 new cases per day in the region as a whole at the beginning of July, and now the five states collectively report more than 5,600 new cases a day, a more than seven-fold increase.

There have been more than 1,000 new cases each day reported in Idaho since September 12, a sharp rise which follows a nadir at the beginning of July when cases dropped below 70 a day. Daily deaths also stand at about 20 a day, a record exceeding the daily death tolls suffered last winter.

The state also continues to set record-high hospitalizations, with a daily average of 661 on October 14 and a peak starting in September that reached 761 the first week of October. The *New York Times* has reported that Idaho officials have activated “crisis standards of care,” allowing packed facilities to ration treatment. “We are being absolutely crushed by COVID,” said Chris Roth, the president and chief executive of St. Luke’s Health System, a network of hospitals across Idaho. Sandee Gehrke, the chief operating officer for St. Luke’s Health System, reports, “We are out of actual hospital beds.”

With a vaccination rate of just 42 percent across the state, some of Idaho’s coronavirus vaccines are expiring because they have sat unused for so long.

Idaho’s Republican Governor Brad Little has refused to set mask mandates in the state since the start of the pandemic. In addition, amidst the current crisis, Lt. Governor Janice McGeachin tried to ban local mask mandates the first week of October.

Montana has seen higher seven-day averages this month than in January of 2021. The week of October 11 had the highest number of cases reported in a single day, 2,200. Hospitals in Montana reached a new high of 510 patients with COVID-19, four more than the previous high in November 2020. Hospitals in Bozeman and Helena reached capacity multiple times over the past month.

Blaine County in Montana, with a population of just 23,000, saw a 464 percent increase of daily cases this week from the average two weeks ago, the highest since the start of the pandemic. Since the pandemic’s beginning, 1 in 6 residents have been infected in Blaine County. Located in Park County, the Livingston Public Schools board voted to hold middle and high school classes virtually starting this coming Wednesday due to a spike in cases at the schools.

Wyoming saw a similar rise, with new cases peaking at an average of more than 500 a day in September before dropping to just over 400 now. The surge has also claimed more than 300 lives in the state since the beginning of July. Similar to Idaho and Montana, hospitalizations have risen since September. The most recent 14-day average was at 228, the highest since winter 2020, when the 14-day average was at nearly identical rates. Despite such high rates of infections, Republican Governor Mark Gordon has also refused even basic public health measures such as mask mandates.

Oregon currently suffers more than 1,000 new cases each day, and last week saw a record 188 deaths in the

state. There are also a record 72,000 active cases throughout the state, more than at any time previously in the pandemic. The sharp rise in cases has taxed the state's health care system to its limits. As of Friday, only 8 percent of intensive care unit beds and 7 percent of non-ICU beds were available.

In Washington, where the first case of COVID-19 was detected in the US, there has also been a sharp rise in cases since the summer. After falling to less than 350 daily cases, the number of new infections rose to 3,500 in early September and has since dipped to 2,500 now. The daily death toll similar climbed, peaking at an average of 42 lost lives per day and now still at 32, still higher than last winter's surge.

Meanwhile President Biden openly acknowledges that his administration's plans to combat COVID-19, first and foremost, are meant to protect the economy. Referencing the "six-pronged program" Biden promises to "use every available tool to combat COVID-19 and save even "more" lives in the months ahead, while also "keeping schools open and safe, and protecting our economy from lockdowns and damage." At the current rate of death, with an average of 1,200 people dying each day, more than 200,000 people will die in the next six months, bringing the official US death toll to about one million.

The current conditions in the US Northwest, along with other states that continue to face high numbers of cases, make it clear that the only viable method for ending the pandemic is eradication. While vaccination is an effective tool, it is not enough to end the spread of the virus. Vaccination is most effective when combined with aggressive public health measures, including the shutdown of nonessential production and schools, along with mass testing, contact tracing and isolation of infected individuals.

In order to fight for eradication, an intervention by the working class to force a change in policy is essential. The working class must be aided with science and understand the strategy for eradication. The WSWS is holding an online webinar on October 24, that will present to a global audience the scientific case for eradication. We call on all of our readers to register for the webinar today, speak to your co-workers about it, and promote the event as widely as possible on social media.

As schools across the country reopen for in-person

learning, COVID-19 cases remain high. In the Pacific Northwest (PNW), Idaho, Montana and Wyoming have seen continued rising rates of cases and hospitalizations since August. Regional data is consistent with the rise in cases nationally. Although both Democratic and Republican politicians promised that vaccinations would end the pandemic, most states are seeing case rates as high as the winter months of 2021.



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