

Scientific truth and the global fight to end the pandemic

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Contrary to the claims of the corporate media and governments worldwide that the COVID-19 pandemic is nearing its end, the grim statistics strongly indicate that the global health crisis is escalating. Many scientists and infectious disease specialists are fearful that the challenging winter environment will result in yet another devastating surge.

In the past week, roughly 2.8 million people were officially infected with COVID-19, and 45,256 people died from the virus worldwide. By the end of the month, the official global death toll will likely surpass 5 million, while estimates of excess deaths place the true death toll at above 15 million.

The danger has been intensified by governments' abandonment of any strategy to end the pandemic. Instead, prioritizing corporate-financial interests over the protection of life, they are displaying a staggering degree of indifference to the ongoing wave of death. The media swings between giddy optimism and apathetic claims that there is no alternative to stoically waiting for COVID-19 to fade away.

In the meantime, the reckless reopening of schools across the United States has driven a surge in pediatric infections, hospitalizations and deaths, with nearly 2 million children infected, 6,523 hospitalized and exactly 200 killed by the virus since July 29, according to data from the American Academy of Pediatrics. Similar harrowing figures exist in the United Kingdom, Canada, Brazil and throughout the world.

Preliminary studies on booster shots appear promising, with mRNA vaccines in particular providing very high levels of antibodies after a third shot. However, due to the profit imperatives of the pharmaceutical monopolies and the absence of a well-funded global vaccination program, only 36 percent of the world's population is fully vaccinated, including just 5 percent of all Africans. Simultaneous with vaccinations, a process of viral evolution is taking place that threatens to create more infectious and potentially vaccine-resistant variants of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

Within this context, it is essential that scientists and workers adopt and fight for a correct policy towards the pandemic. Developing the active collaboration between scientists and an informed public is the most critical task facing humanity today and has the potential to put an end to the needless suffering and deaths of millions of people worldwide. This is the purpose of the upcoming October 24 webinar hosted by the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File

Committees (IWA-RFC) titled, "How to end the pandemic: The case for eradication."

In the course of building for this event, important issues of policy have emerged. Given the enormous global interest in the webinar, attempts have been made to discredit it on social media, with some scientists who have opposed the elimination and eradication of COVID-19 claiming that the central focus of the event on stopping the pandemic is "irresponsible." In doing so, they have harped on the word "eradication," claiming with absolute certainty that this is scientifically impossible.

Arguing in bad faith, those who oppose the upcoming webinar have attempted to generate confusion over the scientific distinctions between "elimination"—ending human-to-human transmission of a viral pathogen in a specific geographic region—and "eradication"—the global extirpation of the virus in nature, including in animal reservoirs.

The WSWS has used both terms—elimination and eradication—in its fight against the irresponsible and even homicidal policies of governments. We have viewed these terms as denoting interconnected elements of a scientifically grounded anti-COVID-19 strategy. The *elimination* of new cases of COVID-19 in ever-broader geographic regions would end the pandemic worldwide—that is, it would bring infections and deaths to zero. For all *practical* purposes, COVID-19 would cease to be a direct and immediate threat to human life. This staggering achievement could lead ultimately, at a later point in time, to the *eradication* of the virus, i.e., its existence on the planet.

There is a debate among scientists about whether eradication—given the existence of animal reservoirs of COVID-19 among mink, deer, cats, dogs and other species—is a practically attainable goal, at least in the near term. Under normal conditions, this debate would be of an essentially theoretical character, with little if any impact on public policy.

However, scientists engaged in the fight to end the pandemic have reported to the WSWS that unprincipled defenders of official policy have sought to discredit the fight of scientists and anti-COVID-19 activists by generating and exploiting confusion about the distinction between elimination and eradication.

They speciously argue that inasmuch as it may be impossible to eradicate COVID-19, the fight for its elimination is a useless waste of time and resources. For example, Dr. Helen Jenkins—an advocate of school reopenings at any cost—has recently tweeted messages aimed at discrediting the upcoming October 24 webinar

of the *World Socialist Web Site*. Attacking the event, she tweeted on October 17, “This is immensely irresponsible. Leading the general public to believe that covid eradication is possible at this point is spreading misinformation.”

This attack is in bad faith. Jenkins presumably knows that the challenges confronting efforts to achieve total eradication do not in the least undermine the feasibility of policies aimed at eliminating the virus. Given that animal-to-human transmission is incredibly rare, the *global elimination* of COVID-19 among humans—effectively stopping the pandemic—remains an entirely attainable goal, provided the necessary public health policies are implemented worldwide.

The fundamental measures necessary for the global elimination of COVID-19 remain the same as those advocated by the WSWS throughout the pandemic: the ending of vaccine intellectual property rights and the establishment of a globally-coordinated program to rapidly vaccinate the world’s population; mass testing, contact tracing, quarantining of exposed people, and the safe isolation of infected patients to identify and cut off the chain of transmission; the temporary closure of schools and nonessential workplaces combined with financial and social supports for all affected workers and small business people; strict travel restrictions and border management; universal masking, improved ventilation and all other measures necessary to minimize infections in essential workplaces.

These simple and highly effective public health measures led to the elimination of COVID-19 in China, New Zealand, Singapore, and a host of other countries in the Asia-Pacific region, as well as Atlantic Canada and other regions, in March-April 2020 and thereafter, all before the development of vaccines. If coordinated on a world scale, the implementation of an elimination strategy in every country could end human-to-human transmission of COVID-19 worldwide within a matter of two to three months.

Under enormous pressure from Wall Street and the global financial oligarchy, combined with the spread of the more transmissible Delta variant that has made containment measures more difficult, almost all countries have ended the elimination strategy, with the most notable exception being China. The fact that China, a mass society of roughly 1.4 billion people, has maintained an elimination strategy for over one year with all outbreaks quickly contained, definitively proves the viability of the elimination strategy in every country.

The debate between eliminationists and eradicationists—staunch allies in the fight to stop the pandemic—must continue and will only be resolved in practice, as public health measures respond to advances in scientific research. Among serious scientists, however, there is no debate about the urgent need to eliminate COVID-19 and stop the pandemic.

Not only would global elimination among humans be a gigantic step forward in saving millions of lives, but it could also lay the foundations for the eradication of COVID-19, a host of other diseases that currently exist and future pathogens that emerge. Any attempt to oppose or vilify such efforts will cultivate the right-wing atmosphere and leave global society even more unprepared for new pandemics, which scientists warn will occur with ever greater frequency unless climate change is halted and reversed.

In the final analysis, the combined efforts of scientists working in the field of epidemiology, virology and related fields of public health and supported by the vigilance of an informed public will determine whether COVID-19 can be eradicated. But the effort to eliminate the coronavirus is not at all incompatible with, and does not require abandoning, the long-term goal of eradication.

The concept of eradication is important and should be the goal for as many infectious diseases as possible. In an influential 2013 article titled “Disease Eradication,” Donald R. Hopkins emphasized the galvanizing impact of adopting a strategy to eradicate a particular pathogen. If a global elimination strategy to end the COVID-19 pandemic is advanced by scientists and an informed public, these same effects would be felt worldwide:

The inherent risks of failure to achieve eradication are offset by the benefits that accrue indefinitely from a successful eradication campaign. The unique power of eradication campaigns derives from their supreme clarity of purpose, their unparalleled ability to inspire dedication and sacrifice among health workers, and their attractiveness to donors, all of which are needed to overcome the barriers to successful eradication. Evidence that disease incidence and intervention coverage are being monitored closely and that progress is being made toward eradication can help secure the resources needed for these demanding campaigns.

The struggle to end the pandemic will not be achieved solely through the efforts of scientists working diligently in fields of epidemiology, virology and other disciplines related to public health. Their noble efforts require mass support, particularly in a period when reactionary forces shamelessly propagate ignorance, confusion and superstition.

The October 24 webinar sponsored by the WSWS will bring together scientists, public health specialists, and working people who are all engaged in the struggle to save lives. The discussion will be aimed at educating, clarifying and laying the basis for effective mass action to end the pandemic.

We urge all of our readers internationally to register today, invite your coworkers, friends and family and promote the event as widely as possible on social media this week.



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