

How to end the pandemic

Five things every autoworker needs to know about the fight against COVID-19

Autoworker Newsletter
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1: The pandemic is still raging

Contrary to the claims of the media and governments worldwide that the pandemic is nearing its end, the virus is still raging.

In the US, more than 125,000 people have died of COVID-19 in the past three and a half months. That's more than 1,600 deaths per day, including an average of three children per day.

Official figures have recorded 750,000 total deaths in the United States and nearly 5 million globally. But these are underestimates.

By tracking all those that have died since the start of the pandemic and comparing those figures to historical trends, the actual number of "excess deaths" can be calculated as about 1 million in the US and a staggering 11 to 16 million globally.

Compared to this time last year, the US is seeing even more new COVID cases per day.

Last winter saw the largest surge of the virus so far in the US, when daily new cases reached above 250,000. Many scientists fear that this winter will see another major surge.

2: Auto plants are one of the top sources of community spread

COVID-19 is an **airborne virus**, which means it spreads rapidly when people gather in enclosed or badly-ventilated spaces—like factories and schools—and breathe the same air.

Most states don't publish location-based outbreak reports, but in Michigan, factories and construction sites have frequently traded places with nursing homes and K-12 schools as the #1 most-likely place to catch COVID-19.

Michigan currently reports 35 ongoing outbreaks at manufacturing and construction sites, and we know that most workplace outbreaks are covered up by the companies and unions.

The Delta variant is so contagious that outbreaks are taking place even at schools and workplaces where masks are worn.

Understanding Aerosols

When the pandemic began, we thought the virus was spreading only through "droplets," which are small particles of moisture that are ejected when we breathe, cough or sneeze. Wearing a cloth mask stops the spread of droplets.

But scientists have improved their understanding of COVID-19 transmission over the last two years. We now know that COVID-19, unlike some other viruses, can become suspended in the air, or "aerosolized."

Aerosolized viruses are "airborne," and can hang in the air for hours, even after the infected person has left the area.

This makes workplaces like auto plants extremely dangerous. Workers can be exposed to COVID-19 even if no one on our shift is sick.

3: As the pandemic goes on, new variants are emerging that are even worse

The Delta variant is more than twice as contagious as the "wild type" COVID-19 virus from which it evolved.

To understand how quickly viruses spread, and how they can be fought, scientists calculate an "R value."

When COVID-19 first became a global pandemic in early 2020, it had an R value of about 3. This means that without vaccinations or other measures to stop the spread, every person infected with COVID-19 went on to infect 3 other people, on average.

Since then, several new variants with new characteristics have evolved, including the “UK variant” which ripped through Michigan in spring of this year.

Now, the Delta variant has become dominant in most countries. It is responsible for 99 percent of new COVID infections in the US. Delta has an R value of 6. It also has been shown to cause “breakthrough” cases in people who are completely vaccinated.

As long as Delta continues to spread, there is a danger that an even more contagious or deadly variant will emerge.

4: The pandemic could be ended in a matter of months

Smallpox is a virus that once plagued humanity but has now been totally eliminated from the planet. Measles and polio have been totally eliminated from the US.

Scientists have shown that even though Delta is extremely contagious, it too can be eliminated. Moreover, this could be achieved in just few months.

To eliminate a virus, R must be brought below 1, so that on average each infected person will infect less than one other person.

One way to lower R is to vaccinate a large percentage of the population, which reduces the likelihood that the virus will spread between people when they come into contact with one another and share the same air.

Vaccines greatly reduce the likelihood of catching and transmitting COVID-19, and of developing severe symptoms. But they are not 100 percent effective.

A more effective way to lower R is to reduce social interaction by temporarily closing schools and non-essential workplaces. If a virus cannot spread from one person to another, it will die.

To stop a virus as contagious as Delta, both vaccines and temporary shutdowns will be required.

This graph shows how Delta could be eliminated.

A moderate rate of vaccination would reduce Delta’s R value to 3.7. A higher rate of vaccination could reduce R to 2.9.

A program of public health (PH) measures, including the temporary closure of schools and non-essential workplaces, but with no vaccines, would reduce R to 1.2. This is still not enough to end the pandemic.

The only strategy which results in elimination is combining vaccines with shutdowns, which brings R down to 0.74.

5: Workers all over the world have started to fight for better conditions

Since the pandemic began, US billionaires have seen their wealth surge 71 percent, or \$2.1 trillion. All of this wealth was created by workers, who continue to fall ill and die from a preventable disease spreading in their workplaces.

But workers across the US have begun to fight to put lives over profit. 10,000 John Deere workers are now on strike in Illinois, Iowa and other states, after voting down a contract backed by the United Auto Workers union by 90 percent. And thousands of nurses and healthcare workers are on strike in New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut and California, in addition to more than 1,400 Kellogg’s workers.

Not only is this the biggest strike wave in the US in generations; it is part of an international upsurge of the working class. 150,000 metalworkers are currently on strike in South Africa. On October 15, parents in the England conducted a school strike which won huge support from workers in the US and all over the world on social media.

In all these struggles, workers are rebelling against so-called “unions,” which falsely claim to represent them. Far from protecting workers, the UAW, the American Federation of Teachers, and other unions have enforced the back-to-school and back-to-work policies of the ruling class which have led to mass illness and death.

In order to fight to put lives over profit, the working class needs science. It also needs organization and leadership. That is why the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) was formed on May 1 of this year: to free workers from the shackles of the existing trade unions, link up the working class internationally.

To explain the scientific knowledge workers need to stop the pandemic and save lives the IWA-RFC is co-hosting an upcoming webinar titled “How to end the pandemic.”



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