

Colorado considers emergency “crisis standards of care” in hospitals as COVID-19 spreads rapidly

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Colorado may introduce emergency measures to handle a surge in COVID-19 cases this week if case numbers do not improve. Democratic Governor Jared Polis said in a statement last Thursday that hospitals could move to “crisis standards of care” to handle the large number of hospitalizations across the state.

Polis followed this up on Sunday by signing two executive orders: one that authorizes the state health department to direct hospitals to stop admissions and transfer patients to other facilities; and another that provides guidelines for implementing crisis standards of care if it is deemed necessary.

The medical crisis in Colorado is severe. Hospital beds are at 90 percent capacity with nearly 1,300 people currently in the hospital. A third of facilities are anticipating a shortage of ICU beds by the end of the week and nearly 40 percent are expecting staff shortages.

If implemented, the crisis measures would involve redirecting less experienced nurses to help in intensive care units, activating the National Guard to take over clerical and nonmedical tasks, and even mobilizing volunteers and family members to assist patients with hygiene in a last-gasp effort to free up medical personnel for more intensive tasks.

The state could also impose the rationing of medical care. This system would involve a triage based on a points system designed to allocate the sickest patients to the last of the available medical supplies. Patients who do not qualify for the intensive care unit, even if they medically require one, will be relegated to standard medical beds where they may not receive the care that they need to survive.

“This is probably the biggest challenge our hospitals

have faced in the modern era,” Cara Welch, the Senior Director of Communications for the Colorado Hospital Association, told CBS News.

Despite the clear threat of an even greater surge of cases as winter sets in, the state government has refused to impose any stricter mitigation measures. Health officials have remained adamant that they will not bring back a statewide mask mandate, nor will they consider restrictions on capacity for indoor activities.

This is the policy of herd immunity and social murder at work. Case numbers in Colorado have been steadily rising for four months. In mid-July the state was recording under 400 cases a day, now daily case numbers are at nearly 3,000. Deaths from COVID-19 have increased as well from a daily average of five in July to over 20 today.

Cases are at their highest point since mid-November last year, just before the Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday surges. Colorado is now two weeks ahead of case numbers from a year ago, even with two-thirds of adults vaccinated. This is a worrying sign that a deadly winter surge may perhaps be even worse than a year ago.

The majority of patients, 77 percent, are unvaccinated. However, a concerning 23 percent of those infected have been vaccinated, demonstrating what leading epidemiologists have warned, that vaccination alone cannot stop the virus.

Behind the surge is a clear sign that school children have been a major source of infection and transmission. Those under the age of 20 make up close to a quarter of all cases in the state, and since May of this year children aged 0-11 have been the single largest group of those exhibiting COVID-related symptoms during

emergency department visits. In total, children aged 0-14 constitute 15 percent of all COVID-related emergency department visits across the state.

The role of schools in fueling the surge in cases is becoming increasingly undeniable. According to data from the State of Colorado, education and childcare is the single largest source of outbreaks, accounting for 1,800 (28 percent) of all outbreaks statewide. Education and childcare has been the largest source of outbreaks since February of this year, outpacing inpatient health care outbreaks, now the second largest source of outbreaks.

Of the 572 active outbreaks in the state, 234 were in K-12 schools, 41 percent. The number of outbreaks in schools last week was also twice as many as the week before, indicating a concerning trend of how quickly COVID-19 spreads through schools.

Yet schools in the state are abandoning the most basic health and safety measures.

Cameo DeDominces, principal of Ryan Elementary in Lafayette, Colorado, told 9 News that her school was relaxing mitigation measures to allow more students into the classroom. "I'd rather start with being more loose because kids need to be in school," she said.

Stephanie Faren, Boulder Valley School District Director of Health Services, told 9 News that schools did not have to quarantine every student in a class when an infection occurs. Instead, schools have been isolating as few students as possible in a desperate bid to keep schools open.

"Having more students in classrooms, you know, we just have to think creatively, and our teachers and our district has been doing that," Faren said.

Such a policy has clearly been a disaster. Since the beginning of the school year in Colorado, there have been more than 4,000 cases officially reported within schools. This figure is most likely an understatement considering that Colorado schools are not required to report cases unless five or more infections can be linked to the same source.

More than a third of all school cases since the beginning of the pandemic last year have been recorded in just the past two and a half months, likely in large part to the spread of the Delta variant, which is now 100 percent of all COVID-19 cases, according to the state data.

With the rate of infection in schools higher than at

any point during the pandemic, it is almost certain that outbreaks will continue to grow as the winter sets in over the next two months.

Significantly, the Democratic Party in Colorado is employing the same deadly policies as the far-right Republican governor of Florida, Ron DeSantis. The virus is being allowed to run free by both parties in order to protect the economic interests of the ruling class. The working class must take the fight against the pandemic out of the hands of the capitalist political parties and take up an independent political fight to eliminate the virus in opposition to the murderous policies of herd immunity.

Regardless of whether Governor Polis implements crisis measures this week or not, infections and deaths will continue unless serious action is taken to stop the pandemic and eliminate COVID-19. Nonessential workplaces and schools must be shut down nationwide and basic public safety measures must be re-implemented.



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