

Six hundred children have been killed by COVID-19 in the US

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The latest data from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) released Monday shows yet another week of mass infection among children in the US. During the week ending October 28, 100,630 new cases were officially reported, marking the 12th straight week that official cases among children have surpassed 100,000.

Sixteen additional child deaths were also reported by the AAP, bringing the cumulative death toll to a grim 600 child deaths since the AAP reports began in May 2020.

Given the deliberate cover-up of reporting of child infections, hospitalizations and deaths in many states across the US, in addition to a lack of systematic testing of symptomatic and asymptomatic children and contact tracing, the numbers are a clear underestimate of the real impacts of COVID-19 on children. The ongoing surge in mass infections coincides directly with the reopening of schools under conditions where community transmission has remained high throughout the US and mitigation policies have been severely limited or entirely scrapped. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that 74 percent of counties in the US still have high levels of community transmission with over 100 new cases per 100,000 persons in the past seven days.

Since schools began reopening for the fall semester three months ago, one third of total reported cases, or 2.2 million, and nearly one third of deaths among children, or 242, have occurred.

Federal and state governments are knowingly allowing for mass infection and deaths among children in order for parents to remain at work to maintain capitalist production. They are doing so on the basis of lies that children are less likely to catch or transmit COVID-19, which were first advanced by the Trump administration and then by Biden. In February 2021, when the Biden administration was pushing its campaign to fully reopen schools across the US, the president told a concerned second-grade child on national television, “Kids don’t

get... COVID very often. It’s unusual for that to happen,” adding, “You’re not likely to be able to be exposed to something and spread it to mommy or daddy.”

This was nothing but a bald-faced lie. Nine months later, millions of children have been infected, potentially hundreds of thousands are currently experiencing Long COVID, and hundreds have died in the US.

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF), among children ages 5-14, COVID-19 was the sixth leading cause of death in August and September. For young people ages 15-24, the virus is now the fourth leading cause of death.

At least 140,000 children in the US and over 5 million children internationally have lost a caregiver since the pandemic began. There is no doubt that children not only are significantly affected by the pandemic now but will also experience significant impacts well into the future. Such a catastrophe has been entirely preventable, yet continues in the US and internationally due to the “herd immunity” policies driven by the prioritization of profits over human lives.

With the approval of the Pfizer vaccine for children ages 5-11 in the US finalized on Tuesday, there is a growing push by government leaders to lift all remaining mitigation measures in schools where they still exist. While vaccinating children is a necessary component to combat COVID-19, vaccines alone are not enough to curb mass infection and deaths.

Emily Oster, an academic who advocated for the reopening of schools before the vaccines were even approved in fall 2020, recently promoted an opinion piece published in the *New York Times* by Jessica Grose, which calls for “an off-ramp for in-school masking.” Oster tweeted the article with the comment, “Masking off-ramps are necessary. I will admit I have been reluctant to talk about this, in part due to fear of being yelled at. This wasn’t brave. I will try to be braver.”

Oster, an academic with no expertise in epidemiology or virology, co-authored a study last year which significantly downplayed the impacts of COVID-19 on children and was utilized by the CDC and both the Trump and Biden administrations to push forward the reopening of schools. Her call for policies to lift mask mandates in schools, which is being pushed by other media outlets and corrupt scientists, is part of a broader promotion of “herd immunity” policies to spread the virus throughout society and cause it to become endemic.

Despite continued efforts to downplay the dangers of school reopenings, data recently published in the *Journal for Infectious Diseases* provides yet more evidence to confirm prior studies which show infants, children and adolescents are in fact able to spread the virus and carry potentially dangerous variants similar to adults, regardless of severity of infection.

Lael Yonker, pediatric pulmonologist at Massachusetts General Hospital and co-author of the study, notes that “Kids with COVID-19, even if asymptomatic, are infectious and can harbor SARS-CoV-2 variants. Variants could potentially impact both the severity of the disease and the efficacy of vaccines, as we are seeing with the Delta variant. When we cultured the live virus we found a wide variety of genetic variants.”

Another survey by KFF found that only one third of children ages 5-11 are expected to be vaccinated by early 2022. Coupled with ongoing high community transmission across the US and the looming winter surge, the threat of mass infection and the spread of more infectious variants among a vulnerable population is increasingly likely. Currently, just 48 percent of US children 12-17 have received one dose of the vaccine.

Roughly 69 percent of US school districts require mask use indoors for students and all staff. Multiple districts that still have limited mitigation measures in place, including Los Angeles Unified School District with over 600,000 students, have language in their contracts to revisit COVID-19 safety protocols at the end of 2021.

Other districts with limited mitigation policies already have policies in place to soon lift mask mandates, including in Massachusetts and Nevada. Massachusetts has a state policy that allows an individual school to provide mask mandate exemptions once a school population reaches the 80 percent vaccination threshold, with two districts in the state already reaching this threshold. On Monday, Hopkinton High School will begin a three week trial allowing for mask use to be optional for students and staff, as 95 percent of the school’s students

and staff are vaccinated.

The effort to lift all mitigation measures in indoor settings is part of an international trend, most acutely expressed by the Johnson administration in the United Kingdom. Open “herd immunity” policies implemented in UK schools have resulted in a catastrophic surge in child cases, with an average of 20,000 children infected with COVID-19 each day and a total of 103 child deaths in the country.

While governments and the mainstream media promote the lifting of already limited mitigations in schools, the recent webinar hosted by the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), entitled “How to end the pandemic,” provided necessary scientific information on COVID-19 and reiterated how dangerous schools really are for children and the broader population.

Dr. Jose-Luis Jimenez provided critical information on the aerosolized character of the virus and the necessity for high-quality ventilation in all indoor spaces. Dr. Deepti Gurdasani shared information on the very real impacts of Long COVID on adults and children, describing the policies of the Johnson administration “actually criminal.” Dr. Howard Ehrman gave a broad overview of the criminal school reopening policies in the US, which have now killed over 2,000 educators and at least 600 children.

Every speaker at the October 24 webinar stressed the need to fight for a strategy aimed at the global elimination of COVID-19. This requires the temporary closure of schools and nonessential businesses with affected workers provided with full income protection, a globally-coordinated vaccination program, mass testing and contact tracing to locate the virus, and more. All of these measures are categorically refused by capitalist governments and will only be implemented through the mass mobilization of the working class, independent of the pro-capitalist trade unions and political parties that have enforced the pandemic policies that have killed millions worldwide.



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