

# Colorado governor issues health orders as COVID-19 cases hit new peak

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COVID-19 cases in Colorado are hitting their highest peak of the year, bringing hospitals to the breaking point. As of November 3, the state was officially reporting 607 active outbreaks, driven by the spread of the Delta variant.

The weekly average of daily new cases is rising steadily, from 2,254 per day in late October to 2,899 on November 1. The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's official tally for new cases on November 4 was 3,164, though the Worldometer website put the number at 4,149.

Once again belying the claim by both Democrats and Republicans that children are less susceptible to the pandemic, the largest share of outbreaks, 242, took place in schools, followed by nursing homes (79) and assisted living facilities (77).

Hospitalizations as of November 3 numbered around 1,300, a 15 percent increase over the previous two weeks and the third largest increase in the nation. With one in every 281 Coloradans diagnosed with COVID-19, Colorado ranks ninth in the rate of new cases.

Rising percentages of hospital beds, on average around 90 percent, are occupied, while the number of patients seeking treatment for severe non-COVID maladies—overdoses, heart attacks, suicide attempts and strokes among them—has also increased.

The remaining 10 percent of available hospital beds amounts to about 900 in the entire state. Adding to the tightening squeeze on hospitals is the steady exit of staff who have either left the state or gone into other lines of work. Those who remain endure overwork, shortages, burnout and empathy fatigue.

In response, Democratic Governor Jared Polis has issued a number of executive orders, while refusing to institute general mask mandates, capacity limits for

businesses and gatherings or other strict mitigation measures, let alone enact an elimination strategy. The raft of orders includes:

- \* Postponement for one month of most elective and cosmetic surgeries. These can include such procedures as cancer surgery or hip replacement.

- \* Prohibition on hospitals refusing to accept patients they have the capacity to treat or refusing send them to a different facility. At the same time, Polis signed an executive order allowing the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment to order hospitals and freestanding emergency departments to stop admitting patients or transfer them elsewhere as capacities are threatened amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

- \* A requirement for counties to consult with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) about additional restrictions if at least 85 percent of their hospital beds become full in the next month.

- \* A requirement for those 12 and over to wear masks at long-term care homes, medical facilities and correctional buildings.

- \* A requirement for vaccine providers to give second shots to anyone who is eligible, whether or not he or she has gotten the first shot, and to give boosters to anyone who claims to qualify.

- \* The implementation of a protocol for prioritizing treatment in emergency cases.

Meanwhile, the Combined Hospital Transfer Center (CHTC), which helps hospitals that are full to transfer patients to other facilities in the state, was shifted into Tier 3, the highest tier, on November 3.

The CTHC was created by the Colorado Hospital Association (CHA) in November 2020 to be “activated should the number of patients needing transfer exceed the capacity of the hospitals.” According to the CHA

website, it will be a “key component of Colorado’s surge plan moving into the winter.” The organization established a three-tier system for dealing with transfers on the local, regional and state levels.

The CHTC was deactivated in February, but the CHA reactivated it on August 27 at Tier 1, under which smaller hospitals were paired with hospital networks with more resources to coordinate transfers. However, with the surge in hospitalizations, the CHA bypassed Tier 2 altogether and moved the CTHC to Tier 3, which coordinates transfers throughout the state.

Colorado health officials have used terms like “crisis,” “in jeopardy of being overwhelmed,” “perfect storm” and “pushing the limits” to describe the current state of affairs. Yet the ruling class’s representatives in government, as well as many of those same health officials, will not advocate or implement the measures that are needed, but which infringe on the profit priorities of the ruling class.

Thus, Polis may say, “The Delta variant is brutally effective at seeking out the unvaccinated, like a laser-guided missile,” but he ignores the fact that a vaccinated person may carry a viral load similar to that of an unvaccinated person, and that breakthrough infections make up a significant minority of cases. Colorado’s mask mandate applies only to the unvaccinated, and restrictions on distancing, gatherings and other mitigation measures have been relaxed or scrapped.

Both ruling class parties, whatever label they may put on their policies, and whatever temporary or half-measures they enact, are willing to let COVID-19 continue to wreak havoc on the lives of workers and their families. They promote the “new normal” of “living with the virus,” as long as the ruling class can continue to extract profits from the workers’ labor.

Science and the experience of countries such as China show that COVID-19 can be eliminated, but the strategy to do so must be taken up by the working class in opposition to the capitalist class and its outmoded and destructive system.



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