

COVID cases surge through northern US states before the holiday season begins

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On the CBS program “Face the Nation” yesterday, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen made a revealing statement about the impact of coronavirus in the US, staying away from offering assurances that inflation and the current crisis in the job market would normalize anytime soon.

She noted, “It really depends on the pandemic. The pandemic has been calling the shots for the economy and for the inflation. And if we want to get inflation down, I think continuing to make progress against the pandemic is the most important thing we can do.” She suggested that any improvement might not take place until next fall—i.e., nearly a year.

This is a stunning admission, especially when every political pundit and public health official, from President Biden on down, has been claiming that the United States is rapidly returning to normalcy with the vaccines, or that COVID eventually will become no worse than the common cold, or at least, will no longer arouse public concern.

A piece by David Leonhardt in the *New York Times* titled “How does this end?” makes precisely this claim that the American people have to accept the risks associated with infection because “the virus is unlikely to go away, ever.”

Jennifer Nuzzo, an epidemiologist at Johns Hopkins University, speaking with the *Washington Post*, made a similar assessment in response to the question as to when the pandemic would end. She replied, “It doesn’t end. We just stop caring. Or we care a lot less. I think for most people, it just fades into the background of their lives.”

Leonhardt is a professional propagandist for the US ruling elite, spreading the political line of the day, which is that working people must live with the virus because they will have no other choice. Nuzzo is a scientist who is capitulating to the political and social pressure of a financial aristocracy that has *never* cared for the lives of

working people, and wants any display of official concern shut down.

Currently, there have been almost 48 million cases of COVID-19 reported across the country, with close to 784,000 deaths thus far. The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation is projecting another 60,000 will perish by the end of the year. The seven-day average of new cases has surpassed 80,000 per day, an 11 percent increase over the last 14 days. Though the daily death toll is currently declining, it remains above 1,100 a day, and the death rate is a lagging indicator in the course of infection, meaning that with rising cases, deaths will also ultimately increase.

Regions of the Midwest and Northeast are seeing new surges in cases. In the South, the declines have ended, and COVID cases are turning upwards.

Minnesota has become the epicenter of the pandemic in the US, with the daily average number of cases climbing to 3,802 or 67 per 100,000 (+54 percent 14-day change), the highest per capita rate in the country. The state has fully vaccinated 61.8 percent of its population, and 22.2 percent have received a third shot known as a booster.

Despite these measures, the number of breakthrough infections has been climbing. According to the public health department, fully vaccinated individuals made up 197 of the 483 deaths occurring from September 5 to October 9. They also accounted for 1,082 of the 3,492 COVID hospitalizations. In all, breakthrough infections have climbed “29 percent over the previous four months.”

Regarding waning immunity, Minnesota exemplifies a critical point. Almost 85 percent of all fully vaccinated individuals in the US received their vaccines four or more months ago. According to the CDC, there have been 29.2 million booster doses given. This accounts for less than nine percent of the population. In other words, a significant portion of all fully vaccinated people are under threat from Delta due to waning immunity.

Kris Ehresmann, Minnesota’s infectious disease

director, told the *Star Tribune*, “It’s fair to say we are kind of in a perfect storm moment. We have Delta as the dominant strain so that certainly has changed the landscape since we first identified it in Minnesota in June. Then you have the impact of waning immunity.”

As the pandemic continues its surge across the upper Midwest and into the Northeast, Illinois, Vermont and New Hampshire are witnessing a startling increase in daily COVID case rates. The ongoing surge in infections in Michigan is particularly troubling as health systems are once more facing high volumes of patients and reconverting their facilities to accommodate COVID patients.

Just yesterday, the state reported close to 9,000 new infections, approaching last winter’s highs. The seven-day average has climbed to over 4,800 daily cases. Deaths have also been steadily rising. According to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, the test positivity rate has surpassed 16 percent, suggesting there are large numbers of undetected cases.

As one Beaumont Health System physician told the press, “Metro Detroit is again becoming a hotspot for COVID-19.” Admission for COVID has jumped 20 percent over the week, raising concerns among hospital administrators about how they will manage this fourth wave of infections.

Dr. Nick Gilpin, Beaumont’s Health’s director of infection prevention and epidemiology, speaking at a news conference last Thursday, said, “I am very concerned about the trajectory of this new wave,” then noting that 397 patients were hospitalized for COVID.

Though these figures are lower than the peaks seen last April, he worried they were climbing rapidly. “This is our early warning system,” he continued. “We are seeing community numbers increase. And I think with more cold weather on the way, with people starting to make plans for the holidays to get together, I think it’s an important time just to let everyone know that we’ve got to stay vigilant. We’ve got to make sure we’re wearing those masks. We’ve got to make sure we’re taking those precautions. We’ve got to get ourselves vaccinated. Those are the things fundamentally that are going to really improve the situation.”

Many Michigan school districts have been forced to shut one or more schools for in-person instruction and revert to online classes because of high infection rates, particularly in rural and outstate areas where vaccination rates are lower. Some schools in Calhoun County (Battle Creek), Allegan County (near Holland) and Jackson

County were closed in whole or in part. The biggest outbreak is in Bay County, with four high schools reporting 221 cases combined, and four middle schools reporting another 168 cases.

Since September, 26 percent of all Michigan COVID cases occurred in people younger than 20, and K-12 schools were the number one category for outbreaks, accounting for 104 out of 181 new outbreaks and 428 of 744 continuing outbreaks.

With one of the highest rates of fully vaccinated people (72 percent), Vermont is also seeing an explosion of cases with a 14-day increase in new cases at 91 percent, reaching 59 COVID cases per 100,000. The trajectory in cases is astounding. Intensive case beds are quickly filling up with patients. The number of available beds is approaching single digits, having reached over 90 percent occupancy, the highest capacity the state has ever encountered.

Dr. Jan Carney, associate dean for public health and health policy at the University of Vermont’s Larner College of Medicine, told the local news station, “Across the United States and Vermont, we’re seeing the impact of the highly contagious Delta variant. It really is so contagious it seeks out pretty much every unvaccinated person.”

Colorado remains among the worst-hit states. Governor Jared Polis, appearing on “Face the Nation,” said that one out of every 48 residents in Colorado has been infected with coronavirus, and virtually all the hospitals are filled to overflowing. There is a statewide order authorizing hospitals to triage vital services—effectively deciding who should live and who should die where there are inadequate resources or numbers of staff.

These trends are extremely ominous as the Thanksgiving week (November 22–28) will soon inaugurate the holiday season. NPR reported that booked flights for Thanksgiving were up 78 percent over last year and even higher than in 2019. These broad-based population movements will drive the rates of new infections across the country.



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