

Astroworld festival disaster: 9-year-old dies as logs reveal negligence by police, organizers

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Ezra Blount, age 9, is the latest person to die following the disastrous crowd crush at the Astroworld music festival in Houston, Texas earlier this month. After a week in a medically-induced coma, the boy succumbed to his injuries on Sunday.

The crush, which took place during the performance of rappers Travis Scott and Drake on November 5, also killed nine other men, women and children, ages 14 to 27. More than 100 lawsuits have been filed, with the Blount family represented by George Floyd attorney Ben Crump.

“I had my son on my shoulders,” Ezra’s father Treston Blount explains in an appeal on GoFundMe. “I began to be crushed until I couldn’t breathe. I passed out. And I woke up and my son was gone.” With “brain damage and trauma to nearly all organs,” he writes, “we are certain that he was trampled.” Family members told local news that Scott was Ezra’s “favorite artist.”

Social media videos document how the crush went on for over an hour, causing hundreds of people to suffer “compression asphyxiation” and lose consciousness. Limp bodies were either dragged from the crowd or trampled as Scott continued to perform and ambulances fought to gain access to dead and injured people near the stage.

While Scott, who has a criminal record of encouraging fans to injure themselves at concerts, clearly played a central role, details continue to emerge which show how festival organizers and staffing contractors created a deadly situation, and local authorities like the Houston Police Department allowed it to happen, ignored countless warning signs, and even allowed the show to continue long after it was known that people were dying.

A damning, 11-page “Houston Fire Activity Log” obtained by the *Houston Chronicle* shows that Houston

Police and festival security lost control of the festival the moment the gates opened on Friday morning. At 9:15 a.m., firefighters note, “HPD [Houston Police Department] preparing to open gates to participants.” Then, minutes later, “Participants breached secondary checkpoint.”

An entry just after 10 a.m. notes, “Venue fences damaged. No control of participants.” There are 10 separate incidents of gate rushing noted throughout the day. By 5:00 p.m., firefighters had estimated that 5,000 people had entered the park without tickets or going through security. By the time Travis Scott took the stage at 9:00 p.m., they estimated that the crowd contained 55,000 people.

The first mention of an “individual with crush injury, breathing difficulty” appears 18 minutes into Scott’s performance. Then, just 10 minutes later, at 9:28 p.m.: “This is when it all got real.” 9-1-1 calls begin pouring in, reporting unconscious people in the crowd. Police declared a “mass casualty event.”

Houston Police Chief Troy Finner said at a press conference on November 6 that by 9:30 p.m., police “went to the producers and told them, ‘Hey, people are going down.’” Yet the show continued until at least 10:10 p.m. Finner defended this delay, saying “You cannot just close when you have over 50,000 individuals, OK? We have to worry about riots when you have a group that’s that young. It was a cooperation and discussion between promoters, my fire department, the police department and NRG [Park] officials. I think that part was pretty good.”

It should go without saying that a festival like Astroworld, which spanned two days and two nights, with 100,000 tickets sold, should never have been allowed to proceed amid a global pandemic that is killing thousands of people every single day around the

world. More than 256 people died from COVID-19 in the last two weeks in Harris County alone, where the festival was held. Moreover, fans traveled from across the region, and even internationally, to attend.

This was a textbook super-spreader event. In the end, more people will likely die, directly or indirectly, from the spread of the virus at Astroworld than from the crush.

The aerosolized virus continues to spread rapidly through workplaces and schools, but nearly two years into the pandemic with no end in sight, governments in the US and around the world are seeking to normalize mass death and declare that we must “live with” the virus. All public safety measures that interfere with profit-making are being lifted. While the bodies pile up, the cry is “Back to work!,” “Back to school!” and “The show must go on!”

Astroworld festival is run by Live Nation Entertainment, the largest concert promoter in the world, which sold over 435 million tickets in 2019 and brought in over \$11 billion in revenue. John Ballard writes for the Motley Fool, “Live Nation's strategy is simple: Promote more shows, sell more tickets, and make additional money through advertising.” He points out that in the year before the pandemic, “ticket sales made up only 13% of total revenue” for Live Nation. Most of the money is made at “the concerts themselves: concessions, parking, rental income, and service charges.”

The 100,000 tickets to Astroworld 2021, which sold out in less than an hour when they became available in May, ranged in price from \$350 for general admission up to \$1000 for VIP passes, before fees. That’s upwards of \$35 million just in ticket sales. Extrapolating from the above percentages means that a festival like Astroworld would be expected to bring in more than \$270 million, or \$2,700 per attendee. Houston’s hotels, restaurants, retailers and so on also collectively have millions riding on such events and the crowds they attract.



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