

Fourteen consecutive weeks with more than 100,000 cases of COVID among US children

Benjamin Mateus
16 November 2021

In its latest update on children and COVID, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) noted that over the past week more than 122,000 children were infected with SARS-CoV-2, a 22 percent rise from two weeks ago. For 14 consecutive weeks, child COVID cases have remained above 100,000. This brings the total number of children who have tested positive as of November 11 to more than 6.6 million.

Though children make up 22.2 percent of the US population, they currently comprise 27 percent of all reported weekly COVID cases. Eleven more children died in the course of the week, bringing the total number who have perished since the beginning of the pandemic to 625, according to official figures.

In a typical flu season, the average number of pediatric deaths is approximately 130. Last year's flu season saw only *one* child die, in part due to the limited measures in place to control the outbreak of SARS-CoV-2 throughout the country.

Though it has been repeatedly stated that children rarely face severe consequences from COVID, these comparisons highlight the dangers the coronavirus poses to them. The terrible toll on children is somewhat overshadowed by the greater magnitude of devastation the pandemic has wrought on the population as a whole. At the same time, politicians and special interest groups, with the support of the corporate media and the teachers' unions, have deliberately downplayed the real dangers children face, in accord with their drive to fully reopen the schools on the basis of in-person instruction.

Schools remain a prime vector for the spread of the virus. It is impossible to objectively discuss COVID and children without also taking into consideration the entire COVID-19 landscape.

Since the end of October, cases have been steadily rising in the US, with the seven-day average of cases nearing 85,000. Though deaths across the country have

continued their decline, they remain high, with a daily average of 1,129. Hospitalizations, a more accurate and meaningful measure of severe infections, have increased in line with the surge in new infections. There are currently more than 47,100 people receiving treatment for COVID in US hospitals.

Essentially every region in the US is presently experiencing a rise in cases or a persistently high number of cases. The situation in the Midwest and Northeast is particularly troubling, with infection rates soaring. Michigan is once more at the epicenter of the rapidly shifting COVID map. In its latest COVID update, the state government astoundingly reported over 23,000 new cases.

According to the *New York Times*' COVID dashboard, the daily average of cases stands at 7,174 in Michigan, a 68 percent increase over 14 days. On a per-capita basis, 72 per 100,000 are becoming infected. The number hospitalized is closing in on 3,000, with a 31 percent increase in admissions over the past two weeks. Pediatric hospitalizations for COVID are also on the rise. The seven-day positivity rate has reached 16 percent.

The sudden surge has once again caught public health and state officials off-guard, though principled scientists had warned of such a development. Back in September, 26 percent of all Michigan COVID cases were occurring in people younger than 20. Of the 181 outbreaks in that month, 104 developed in K-12 schools, underscoring the relationship between infection among school children then and community transmission now. AAP updates noting the recurrent rise in infections among children in conjunction with the increase in cases across the US offer further corroboration of these observations.

In Michigan, many school districts have been forced to close and revert once again to online classes in the last few days, particularly in rural areas where vaccination uptake has been lowest. Yesterday, state health officials

reported 87 new outbreaks linked to schools over the past week, resulting in more than 521 infections among staff and students. In total, the state has reported 576 active outbreaks, an increase of 7 percent from the previous week's figure of 539.

Due to an alarming rise in cases in Detroit, the Public School Community District sent school board members an urgent email requesting their input as to whether the district should switch to remote learning on Fridays only. In a statement to WXYZ News, the district wrote, "Due to staff feedback, the district is reviewing options to infuse more online learning days between now and January to address mental health breaks for staff and students, improve the cleanliness of schools, and acknowledge rising COVID rates."

The shocking statement, asking permission from the board to reduce the exposure of students and staff to the dangers posed by the deadly virus, is like asking for permission to vacate a burning building. Paralysis, inaction and indecision have dominated local officials caught in the web of mechanisms imposed by the capitalist state and both big business parties to ensure the full opening of the economy and maximization of corporate profit in the face of catastrophic levels of suffering and death.

The teachers' unions, fully integrated into the corporate establishment and the state, play the central role in suppressing opposition among educators and staff and forcing them to work in unsafe schools.

In the course of a single week, the number of school staff in Detroit infected rose from 20 to 52. The number of students infected increased from 198 to 292, while 921 students and staff were quarantined. And yet, Terrence Martin, the president of the Detroit Federation of Teachers, told WXYZ TV in Detroit, "We're hoping with one less day of face-to-face contact, *that* can help control the spread." [Emphasis added].

There are about 28 million children aged 5 to 11 in the US. Only 360,000 have so far been partially vaccinated. This accounts for less than 2 percent within this age group.

Several polls have reported that roughly 30 percent of parents surveyed will not allow their children to be vaccinated. As of last month, less than 50 percent of 12- to 17-year-old adolescents were fully vaccinated, a total of 12.4 million. Across nine states, less than a third of eligible teens have been inoculated.

Not only are a significant majority of children and adolescents unvaccinated and vulnerable to the immediate

ramifications of infection, they will also be at risk from the long-term complications many will experience following their bout with the acute phase of the disease.

In a recent systematic review of Long COVID published in *JAMA Network Open*, the authors found that 50 percent of people who survived COVID-19 experienced various physical and psychological symptoms six months or more after their initial recovery.

They suffered a noticeable decline in their general sense of well-being, loss of weight, extreme fatigue, and even pain. One-quarter had problems concentrating, a condition now better known as brain fog. Almost one-third were dealing with repeated episodes of anxiety. Additionally, symptoms of shortness of breath were common. Stomach upsets and chest pains were frequent complaints. These maladies will have untold consequences for this generation of children over several years, if not decades.

The current wave of COVID infections among children is the product of the Republican and Democratic parties' insistence on and success in forcing schools to reopen, in close collaboration with the teachers unions. By the end of September, the research firm Burbio had reported that 98 percent of schools were open for business, becoming the primary mechanism for the present surge across the country. With the holidays around the corner, the situation creates a perfect storm, with millions of Americans planning to celebrate with family and friends.

President Biden remarked, "A year ago, we were heading into a Thanksgiving where public health experts were advising against traveling or gathering with family and friends. Last Thanksgiving, for the first time, it was just four of us. ... Later this month, our tables and our hearts are going to be filled, thanks to the vaccines."

And health care workers will be attempting to resuscitate and save the lives of soaring numbers of patients who were needlessly infected, including many children.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact