

Pentagon dispatching emergency medical teams to Minnesota as another winter surge of COVID-19 infections takes hold in the US

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On Wednesday, Democratic Governor Tim Walz released a statement announcing that he had secured emergency federal medical teams to support Minnesota hospitals. The Pentagon is sending emergency medical teams to hard-hit hospitals in the state to relieve health care workers there that are facing a continuous onslaught of COVID-19 patients.

“Hospitals around the state need urgent support, and my administration is using every tool at our disposal to help them,” Walz’s statement declared. “The emergency staffing teams coming to HCMC [Hennepin County Medical Center] and St. Cloud Hospital over the next few days will provide an important measure of relief to the healthcare personnel who remain on the frontline of this crisis. Every day, our doctors and nurses are treating Minnesotans sick with COVID-19 or suffering other emergencies. But they are underwater, and they need all the help we can give them.”

The rise in cases in Minnesota has been steady and unyielding. On November 16, the state recorded its high mark of close to 11,000 new COVID-19 cases. The seven-day average has reached 4,224 daily infections. The Minnesota Department of Health said that 1,381 people were being treated at hospitals across the state on Thursday, of which 333 were receiving treatment in intensive care units (ICU). Zero available ICU beds remain in east-central Minnesota, two in the far northwest, and only seven across the Minneapolis-St. Paul metro system. On average 24 people in the state are dying from COVID-19 every day.

Developments in the upper Midwest—Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois and Michigan—represent the leading edge of the wave of illness and death that will hit the country in the latest phase of the pandemic. There are now 35 states reporting a rise in cases over the last two-week period underscoring the beginning of a dangerous winter with the coronavirus supplemented with predictions of a severe flu season.

The seven-day average in the US is now over 88,000 daily COVID cases. Yesterday, there were more than 114,000 reported new infections. Hospitalizations for COVID-19 are now approaching 50,000. Though the seven-day average of deaths has slowly declined to just below 1,100, the number of

COVID-19 deaths reported yesterday jumped to over 1,600. Overall, the COVID-19 death toll in the US has surpassed 788,000, with projections of 40,000 more deaths in the next six weeks.

The latest resurgence in the United States comes as the number of new cases globally has been steadily climbing for four consecutive weeks. More than 254 million cumulative cases have been reported since the pandemic began in early 2020. Weekly reported COVID deaths have been hovering just below 50,000 for the last six weeks bringing the total to over 5.14 million reported deaths.

Though Europe is in the midst of the worst wave of infections since the beginning of the pandemic, the rise in COVID-19 cases in the US has many concerned about what awaits the country, especially with Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays around the corner. With all travel restrictions having been lifted, population mobility is at an all-time high, and mask usage is rapidly declining.

The situation is all the more alarming because most countries in Europe have vaccinated a far larger share of their populations than the US. Though the US is calling for all adults to get the third shot, also known as a booster, only 31.5 million, or less than 10 percent, have received them. Additionally, a significant number of fully vaccinated people received their last shot more than six months ago, meaning their waning immunity places them at increased risk of breakthrough infection.

Dr. Sara Spilseth, Chief of Staff at Regions Hospital in St. Paul, Minnesota, speaking with local media, said, “I did not realize that it could get worse, but here we are.” The number of COVID-19 patients hospitalized there has doubled over the last two weeks. “People are dying from COVID even though they don’t have COVID. They are dying from COVID because our hospitals are so full of COVID patients that we can’t take care of anything else.”

Commenting on the rising number of colleagues quitting and those remaining being offered bonuses to take extra shifts, ICU nurse Emily Allen told the NBC affiliate KARE 11, “Personally, it’s still just not mentally worth it for me. It’s scarier for me this time. I have a young family. I’m six months

pregnant, which is new from the last time we talked, and I'm just not mentally in a place to pick up any extra shifts no matter what the money is. I think a lot of people feel that same way."

Despite the current calamity, no matter how many health care workers are "underwater" and "need all the help we can give them," Governor Walz has reiterated that he has no intentions of implementing a state of emergency across the state and implementing measures to halt the spread of COVID-19. "It's just not that effective a tool right now to use that [emergency declaration]," he said, then cited his concerns that it would worsen tensions with the Republican-led state senate. His solution for the population was to "just get vaccinated. That's the big thing."

Meanwhile, in Michigan, the seven-day average doubled in just two weeks, jumping from around 4,000 daily cases to over 8,400, the highest rates during the pandemic. On November 15 the state update recorded over 23,000 new cases. The positivity rate of COVID-19 tests has climbed to 19 percent.

There are currently 60 children hospitalized across the state for confirmed or suspected COVID-19 infections, just shy of the peak of 71 reported on April 20. This is also a more than 50 percent rise in pediatric hospitalizations since November 3. Dr. Rudolph Valentini, a pediatric nephrologist speaking with the *Detroit Free Press*, explained, "We are a little bit on edge at this point. We currently are managing. It's absolutely manageable, but it appears as though there's trouble around the corner."

There are more than a dozen hospitalized children at Children's Hospital of Michigan, where the ER has seen a 70 percent rise in visits. Many are sicker than during any previous phase in the pandemic. Up to half are being treated in ICUs. Valentini, describing these developments, explained, "A fair number of them are requiring ventilation, and we have some requiring ECMO [extracorporeal membrane oxygenation], which is a heart-lung bypass."

The spread of the virus, dominated by the Delta variant, is highest among those aged 10 to 19, corresponding with exposure in school settings. Last week, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services reported 566 new and ongoing outbreaks in K-12 schools. However, state officials continue to shift the blame to children for not adhering to social distancing and masking recommendations instead of the reopening policies that have perpetuated one community outbreak after another.

On Wednesday, staff and students at Martin Luther King High School in Detroit protested the administration's foul response to the pandemic by walking out *en masse*. The noon protest lasted 20 minutes and underscored the prevailing mood of the students and teachers who are fed up with the betrayals of the unions and school boards that have placed their lives and livelihoods at risk.

Meanwhile hospitals across Wisconsin are operating at full capacity. And despite the alarming statistics, officials are

limiting their actions to asking unvaccinated residents to "take the shot." School closures, mask mandates, restrictions in movements and numbers that can gather are a thing of the past. Infections in Illinois have increased 70 percent over the last three weeks.

Dr. Michael Osterholm, the director of the University of Minnesota's Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy, was recently asked by MPR News about his opinion on the recent lifting of the ban on international travel while Europe was facing a deluge of infections. He replied, "One of the problems in dealing with COVID is it moves so quickly that you may embark upon a new public policy that is responding to what was happening yesterday or last week only to see it change this week."

As pressure is being placed on the current variants as they are passed between the vaccinated and unvaccinated, there are growing fears that a fully vaccine-resistant variant may evolve by spring.

Dr. Mark Dybul, CEO of Enochian BioSciences and a professor at Georgetown University Medical Center's Department of Medicine in immunology, raised his concerns for where the pandemic is headed this week at the *Fortune* CEO Initiative conference in Washington D.C.

Predicting possible scenarios for how the pandemic might end, saving the direst for last, he said, "The third possibility is that it's a mess for the foreseeable future everywhere because the virus will mutate so much that it will even get around therapies. That's really unlikely. I think we're heading towards the middle scenario, but it's gonna take two to three years to get there. In between could be pretty rough."

The middle scenario, as Dybul described, is one in which the high-income nations who have a monopoly on vaccines and therapeutics will ride the waves while poorer countries face the brunt of the virus, resulting in tens of thousands of preventable deaths.

The call by the WWSW and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees for a global strategy to eliminate COVID-19 remains the only viable solution to the pandemic and the preservation of life. The working class, armed with the most advanced scientific understanding of the pandemic, must take action to shut down non-essential production and schools—with full compensation for those affected—in coordination with a massive vaccination, testing, contact tracing and quarantine program which will finally stop the spread COVID-19 and ultimately eliminate the deadly virus.



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