

COVID-19 now the leading cause of death in Arizona

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A recent study by the Arizona Public Health Association (APHA) determined that COVID-19 is the leading cause of death in the southwestern state, outstripping both heart disease and cancer, the principal cause of fatalities nationwide. The public health nonprofit reported that between mid-March 2020 and mid-October 2021, just short of 21,000 Arizonans succumbed to the coronavirus. By November 19, the number of fatalities had reached 21,808, according to the Arizona Department of Health Services (AZDHS) COVID-19 dashboard.

APHA Executive Director Will Humble discussed the findings with KTAR News FM's *Arizona Morning News* on November 16, saying, "We are unique." He enumerated a partial list of reasons for the Grand Canyon State's illaudable distinction: "The lack of statewide face covering mandates, the lack of using vaccine requirements among state government, universities, communities, etc."

That is only part of the story.

Every state government, under Democratic and Republican administrations, to varying degrees has ignored or distorted the science and recent experience, plowing ahead with reckless measures, such as the reopening of schools and workplaces, scrapping of mask mandates and inconsistent vaccination policies, not to mention the out-of-hand rejection of an elimination program.

Arizona's Republican governor, Doug Ducey, has gone above and beyond the call of duty to the ruling class demand for profits over lives. He, Attorney General Mark Brnovich and the state legislature have undermined mask and vaccine mandates through various means, while making bogus references to "individual liberties," "parental rights," federalism and the separation of powers and denouncing the

"lockdown lobby."

Brnovich filed a lawsuit in September for a restraining order and injunction in US District Court against President Joe Biden's vaccination orders for federal workers and contractors. The judge ruled against the suit on November 11 but allowed for a refile on November 19.

Brnovich then sent a letter to Ducey calling on him to prevent vaccination mandates, claiming, "Protecting people from government COVID-19 vaccine mandates must be a priority. I am urging the Governor to take immediate steps to help protect Arizona families." As part of this "protection," he urged the governor to call a special session of the Arizona Legislature to uphold four budget-related bills that it had passed earlier in the year but which were struck down by a lower court judge.

His office also called for the AZDHS to issue an emergency rule that prevents political subdivisions from mandating COVID-19 vaccines for public employees.

Ducey needed no prompting. In addition to his other attacks on science and common sense, earlier this year he had set aside \$163 million in federal COVID-19 relief funding for a grant program that only applied to Arizona schools without mask mandates. If school districts did not rescind their mask mandates within 10 days, they would be barred from access to the grant money.

He has also continued giving private school vouchers to parents who oppose their children's school mask and quarantine requirements. Ducey aide Jason Mistlebauer rationalized these gambits by feigning concern for poor families, ludicrously claiming, "In Arizona, disadvantaged communities bear the brunt of overbearing measures, and the state wants to ensure

that low-income students are not disproportionately affected by mask mandates rules and school closures.”

However, as *U.S. News & World Report* pointed out on November 4: “Despite the rationale Mistlebauer laid out, a \$163 million grant program Ducey created goes to schools in high-income areas, but only if they do not require masks. And a much smaller program that gives private school vouchers to parents whose children’s public schools have mask mandates or require isolation after COVID-19 exposures doesn’t only target low-income children. Applicants can earn up to 350% of the federal poverty level, which equals \$92,750 for a family of four.”

Ducey has turned a deaf ear to the Treasury Department’s description of the programs as “not a permissible use” of the federal funding and has defied court rulings against them.

The results of all this subterfuge, hypocrisy and skulduggery have been entirely predictable. COVID-19 admissions to Arizona hospitals are at their highest numbers since February, and after a dip in previous months, have risen by 35 percent since October 25. The AZDHS stated on November 17 that 6 percent of hospital beds statewide were available, the lowest rate since the beginning of the pandemic.

At Valleywise Health Medical Center in Phoenix, adult occupancy hit 100 percent on November 17, with the COVID-19 ICU at 96 percent. The more than 40 COVID-positive patients at Valleywise are twice as many as three weeks before. At another hospital system, HonorHealth, five of its six acute care hospitals are at full occupancy.

Seasonal illnesses, routine care, surgeries, all are competing with the influx of COVID-19 patients in understaffed and overcrowded facilities.

In regard to children, AZDHS assistant director Jessica Rigler told KTAR News 92.3 FM on Nov. 16, “We do continue to see high case counts among kids in Arizona... With school in-person and people back out doing activities, we are seeing more cases in children and that’s why it’s so important to have the entire family vaccinated and for people to be wearing their masks when they can’t be socially distanced outdoors or when they are in indoor spaces.”

However, though Arizona’s 6.3 percent rate of kids vaccinated puts it slightly above lower-rung states, like Wyoming (4 percent), Idaho and Tennessee (5 percent),

it lags far behind those of states like Colorado, Utah and Illinois, where 11–12 percent are vaccinated.

On November 3, Agua Caliente Elementary School in Tucson shut down in-person classes for two weeks with over 40 active COVID-19-positive cases. Half the student body had been absent on the two preceding days. The school’s masking rate was about 40 percent.

Also in Tucson, the Arizona State Schools for the Deaf and the Blind took its Thanksgiving break early after four drivers tested positive for the virus.

Last week, the Marana Unified School District temporarily closed down eight classrooms at Estes Elementary. Two classes experienced an outbreak while six shut down due to exposure. In Maricopa County, there were 249 active outbreaks; 233 of them were in elementary schools.

These statistics do not give a full picture of the extent of the surge. As the Arizona Center for Investigative Reporting (AZCIR) reported on August 31: “A patchwork of outbreak and quarantine notifications from school districts has sown confusion among families about the scope of on-campus exposure. And while districts report infection data to county health officials, who in turn submit it to the state, that information is seldom relayed back to the public in an accessible, thorough way, an AZCIR analysis has found.

“Just 30% of Arizona’s 215 traditional school districts provide public-facing dashboards that track outbreaks by school, according to AZCIR’s review of their websites. Of the state’s 15 county health departments, only Pima County publicly monitors active COVID-19 cases by district.”

The only way to break the chain of transmission, and the disinformation campaign that enables it, is through the formation of rank-and-file safety committees in Arizona, across the US and globally which will implement an international, scientifically guided strategy which will eliminate COVID-19.



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