

US 2021 COVID-19 death toll now tops 2020

Patrick Martin
21 November 2021

More Americans have died of COVID-19 in 2021 than in the first year of the pandemic, according to Johns Hopkins University and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The figures demonstrate the terrible human cost of the policy of “living with the virus,” pursued by the Biden administration and corporate America, which in reality means allowing hundreds of thousands to die from the virus.

The figures from the CDC and Johns Hopkins were published by the *Wall Street Journal*, together with other information the newspaper collected from several health care and insurance company studies. The total number of deaths due to the pandemic hit 770,800 on Saturday, with 385,343 deaths in 2020 now surpassed by 385,457 deaths in 2021—and there are still six weeks remaining in the year.

The 2021 figure is particularly disastrous because vaccines have been available throughout the year, first for health care workers and the most vulnerable seniors, then more generally, for all adults and youth aged 12 and over. Most recently, vaccinations have been made available to children aged 5-11.

The most recent surge in COVID-19 has been in New England and the Upper Midwest, with the seven-day average for new cases hitting 93,196 on Friday, November 19, up 30 percent in just three weeks from 70,271 on October 25. The upcoming Thanksgiving holidays, filled with travel and family gatherings, will undoubtedly send the daily average rocketing past 100,000.

Among the worst-hit states is Michigan, which accounted for one in ten of all new coronavirus cases last week, even though the state has only three percent of the US population. According to the CDC, Michigan has the highest seven-day case rate in the country, 589.3 cases per 100,000, double that of neighboring Ohio. Hospitalizations have jumped 62 percent since

November 1, and more than 400 people in Michigan died from COVID-19 last week.

The state’s fully vaccinated rate of 54.2 percent trails the US average of 58.9 percent. The state health department has issued an advisory urging everyone aged two years and older to wear a mask indoors except for family members who live under the same roof. This would apply to all Thanksgiving gatherings this coming week. At the same time, the state health director said there were no plans to stop in-person instruction in schools or impose mask mandates.

For the entire year, the worst-hit states are in the South: Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee and Florida. Mississippi has both the highest death rate per capita, and one of the lowest vaccination rates, only 47 percent.

While nearly 200 million people in the United States are fully vaccinated, and 450 million jabs have been delivered, there are tens of millions of adults still not vaccinated, and tens of millions of children have either not received shots or are under five and remain ineligible. The unvaccinated make up the bulk of new cases of infection, hospitalization and death.

The *Journal* cited figures reported by the public health department of Los Angeles County, which found that “unvaccinated people were nearly five times more likely to get COVID-19 and about 29 times more likely to be hospitalized than fully vaccinated people.”

The Delta variant has played a major role in the continually rising toll from the pandemic, as it is far more transmissible. There are also a significant number of breakthrough infections, although as a percentage of those vaccinated, breakthroughs still remain comparatively low—roughly one percent.

The *Journal* also reviewed state-by-state data which is collected inconsistently, but reveals definite patterns. Of the 195 million fully vaccinated, about 1.89 million have contracted COVID-19, with 72,000 hospitalized

and about 20,000 deaths, according to the figures reported by the states.

This means that breakthrough infections account for about seven percent of the 27.6 million people who have contracted COVID-19 in the United States this year, while the unvaccinated constitute 93 percent of the total.

Those vaccinated who suffered the worst results—hospitalization in an Intensive Care Unit and/or death—were overwhelmingly drawn from the elderly and those suffering from serious health problems pre-COVID, and usually both. The *Journal* reported, “people with diabetes, chronic lung disease, kidney disease and compromised immune systems were at risk of serious outcomes from breakthrough cases, the data show.”

According to one research firm with access to hospital medical data, Truveta Inc., “among 1.7 million fully vaccinated people ... those with diabetes, chronic lung disease and chronic kidney disease were about twice as likely to be hospitalized for breakthrough cases as vaccinated people without these conditions.”

Vaccinated people with those conditions were both more likely to suffer a breakthrough infection and more likely to be hospitalized if they did contract the virus.

A second research firm which shared its results with the *Journal*, Epic Health Research Network, found that 80 percent of breakthrough deaths were among people aged 65 or older. By comparison, those aged 65 and older accounted for 69 percent of all COVID-19 deaths this year, counting both the vaccinated and unvaccinated.

While people under 65 made up 19 percent of COVID-19 deaths in 2020, they accounted for 31 percent of all COVID-19 deaths this year. This is due in part to the much higher vaccination rate among the elderly, but the greater transmissibility of the Delta variant and the reopening of schools and workplaces must account for the bulk of this shift.

COVID-19 deaths among younger people more than doubled in 2021, although the death rate still remains far lower. About 10,000 of the 385,000 who died in 2020 were under 45 years old, while in 2021, that figure has risen to 20,563.

The Epic research found a “tipping point” for breakthrough cases at about 20 to 22 weeks after people received their second shot. This underscores the

necessity for booster shots no later than six months after becoming fully vaccinated.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact