

Child infections fuel COVID-19 surge across the US

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On Monday, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) released its latest weekly report on child COVID-19 infections, hospitalizations and deaths in the United States. The data is hampered by the deliberate efforts of state and federal authorities to cover up the spread of the pandemic, but nevertheless it presents damning evidence of the impact of the full reopening of schools this fall.

The AAP report found that for the week ending November 18, another 141,905 children were officially infected with COVID-19, the 15th straight week of over 100,000 official new cases. After reaching a trough of 100,630 new cases for the week ending October 28, this figure surged by 41 percent in just three weeks. The region with the greatest increase in child infections was the Midwest, where nearly 60,000 children were infected last week, a roughly 40 percent increase from the week prior.

Children accounted for 25.1 percent of all COVID-19 infections last week, making clear that the reopening of schools continues to fuel the broader surge of the pandemic across the country. The spread of the Delta variant since the end of summer has coincided with the reopening of schools, with roughly 13.5 million Americans officially infected with COVID-19 and 164,291 killed by the virus since schools began to fully reopen four months ago.

Alongside the surge of infections, child hospitalizations are once again on the rise, with just under 1,250 children now hospitalized with COVID-19 in the US. An average of 152 children under 18 are now hospitalized with COVID-19 each day.

The AAP report notes that 636 children have now officially died from COVID-19, with 12 children dying last week in Arizona (4), Ohio (2), California (1), Indiana (1), Kansas (1), Minnesota (1), North Dakota (1), and Texas (1). No information on any of these deaths has been made public, with only one article each from local press in Kansas and North Dakota even acknowledging them.

The deepening wave of infections, hospitalizations and deaths among children are all the more tragic given that a vaccine has finally been approved for all children above the

age of four. On Monday, Pfizer and BioNTech released preliminary data finding that their vaccine remains 100 percent effective against symptomatic infection for children ages 12-15 years old four months after the second dose. Roughly two-thirds of all children ages 5-17 remain unvaccinated in the US, and millions were exposed to the virus just weeks before the approval of the vaccines.

The data in the AAP report provides only a glimpse into the devastation wrought by the pandemic policies of the American ruling class. Texas, Alabama, Nebraska and New York (excluding New York City) no longer report child infections. Only 24 states report data on child hospitalizations. Michigan, Montana, New York (excluding New York City), Rhode Island, Utah and West Virginia do not report figures on child deaths from COVID-19.

Furthermore, the level of testing conducted in the US is totally inadequate for all age groups, including children. While the official cumulative total of child infections documented by the AAP is roughly 6.8 million, seroprevalence studies conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimate that in reality roughly 25.8 million children under 18 have likely been infected with COVID-19 from the start of the pandemic through September 2021, over a third of all children in the US.

The long-term social impacts of the pandemic are not quantifiable. Studies on Long COVID among children indicate that millions continue to suffer debilitating symptoms for many weeks after their initial infection, and it remains unknown how long these symptoms will last.

A study published in the journal *Pediatrics* in early October found that by June 30, 2021, over 140,000 children in the US experienced the death of a parent or grandparent caregiver due to COVID-19. This figure has likely surpassed 200,000 amid the ongoing surge of the Delta variant.

The catastrophic impacts of the pandemic have radicalized millions of workers and young people, who increasingly recognize that their lives and those of their families and communities have been sacrificed in the interests of the

financial elite. There is a growing understanding that the only reason schools were reopened was to send parents back to work to produce corporate profits.

Last week, roughly 200 students led their teachers in a 20-minute walkout at Martin Luther King, Jr. High School in Detroit, Michigan, in response to widespread infections at the school and district. Official data from the state showed that 44 students were infected last week at Renaissance High School, while 38 students and staff were infected at Cass Technical High School in Detroit. In total, there were 140 new outbreaks in Michigan schools last week, a 61 percent increase from the previous week, while the number of positive cases linked to those new outbreaks rose 71 percent to 891.

Fearing that last week's walkout would spread throughout the district and galvanize broader opposition, Detroit Public Schools (DPS) quickly announced an extension of the Thanksgiving break to this entire week. Nearly three dozen other districts throughout Michigan have similarly closed schools this week, both in response to COVID-19 outbreaks and worsening staff shortages.

The entire American political establishment, backed by the corporate media, the teachers unions and the CDC, have continuously lied to the public about the effects of COVID-19 on children and the impact of school reopenings on viral transmission.

The campaign to reopen schools before the elimination of COVID-19 began on July 8, 2020, when then-President Donald Trump tweeted, "SCHOOLS MUST OPEN IN THE FALL!!!" Despite multiple scientific studies having already proven that children catch and transmit COVID-19 as readily as adults, then-CDC Director Robert Redfield modified school reopening guidelines with the lying claim, "We really don't have evidence that children are driving the transmission cycle of this."

Upon his election, President Joe Biden pledged to fully reopen schools in Democrat-led districts that were still providing remote learning. In fulfilling this pledge, he relied on the new CDC Director Rochelle Walensky to modify school reopening guidelines repeatedly in February and March. The updated guidelines downplayed the significance of ventilation and reduced spacing recommendations between students from six feet to three in order to pack each classroom.

Biden himself lied directly to a second grader on national television, telling her, "You're not likely to be able to be exposed to something and spread it to mommy or daddy." He added, "Kids don't get ... COVID very often. It's unusual for that to happen."

The most critical role has been played by American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten,

who told the *New York Times* in February 2021 that she spent upwards of 15 hours each day on the phone with the White House, the CDC, local politicians and union officials to orchestrate the school reopening drive in Chicago, Philadelphia, Los Angeles and other major cities.

On Sunday, Weingarten and the AFT purchased an advertisement in the *Times* in order to promote the unions to the paper's upper-middle-class readers. In the ad, Weingarten writes, "Our affiliates across the country negotiated health and safety protocols to reopen schools and keep them open for in-person learning during the pandemic." Of course, the ad omits the fact that since July 22 more than 2.6 million children have officially been infected with COVID-19.

All of these figures bear primary responsibility for the homicidal school reopening policies that have been implemented in the US. They have consciously allowed masses of children and their families to be infected, suffer long-term debilitation and die.

The investigation of this social crime will be a critical component of the Global Workers' Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic, which has been initiated by the *World Socialist Web Site*. The same school reopening policies have been implemented in countries throughout the world and have been central to the broader spread of the pandemic over the past two years.

While the investigation into the crimes of the past two years is underway, it is essential to deepen the fight to end the pandemic now. In order to stop the wave of infections and deaths that are mounting globally, a mass movement must be built that is consciously fighting to implement a strategy to eliminate COVID-19 in every country. This requires the immediate closure of all schools and nonessential workplaces with full income protection for affected workers, and the deployment of all public health measures to stop the spread of the virus, combined with a program to safely vaccinate the world's population.

The development of networks of rank-and-file committees, independent of the corporatist unions and the capitalist political parties, will provide the basis for uniting workers and young people across industries and national boundaries to coordinate their struggles to stop the pandemic and save lives.



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