Michigan COVID-19 wave escalates as Democrats reject measures to halt the spread

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The catastrophic public health crisis in Michigan deepened on Friday as the federal government committed to send 44 military medical personnel to the state to assist in treating the largest surge in COVID-19 cases in the state since the beginning of the pandemic.

On Wednesday the Michigan Department of Health and Human Service (MDHHS) confirmed that the Biden administration had granted a request from Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer for assistance and was sending two teams of 22 medical personal to one hospital in the Detroit area and one in Grand Rapids.

An MDHSS statement said the teams would "support staff at Beaumont Hospital, Dearborn and Spectrum Health in Grand Rapids. The teams, which will include registered nurses, doctors and respiratory therapists will arrive next week and begin treating patients immediately, providing support for the next 30 days."

Michigan is now the epicenter of the pandemic in the US, accounting for approximately one in ten new cases in the country, while the population of the state represents just 3 percent of the US total. New cases in Michigan have increased by 67 percent and new hospitalizations by 46 percent in the past two weeks.

These devastating increases have eclipsed any previous surge in Michigan since the first wave of the pandemic in the spring of 2020. As of Thanksgiving Day, the seven-day average number of new cases in the state rose to 8,457, shattering the previous average record set last April during the third wave.

As reported on Thursday by the *World Socialist Web Site*, the rapid increase in cases and hospitalizations in Michigan is a canary in the coal mine. Medical facilities are beyond full capacity and health care staff have been burned out as the situation continues to spiral out of control as the pandemic hurtles towards its third year.

The *Washington Post* reported on Thursday that emergency rooms at Spectrum Health facilities in Grand Rapids were "already packed with people suffering other medical issues." The health care system was upgraded to "red status," the most serious tier available, and hospitals and EMS providers in the area are facing "a tipping point."

While Michigan health care officials have been focusing on the numbers of the unvaccinated as being responsible for the current surge—in Michigan 54.4 percent of the public is fully vaccinated and just 59 percent have received both doses in the US—the Whitmer administration not only failed to prepare for the present crisis but enabled it.

Although the winter surge had been predicted for months by epidemiologists and public health experts, Whitmer pressed ahead with lifting all pandemic restrictions at the beginning of the summer. Even as the highly infectious Delta variant was steadily spreading around the state during the summer and fall, schools were reopened for in-classroom learning and businesses were permitted to act as though the virus had been vanquished.

Elizabeth Hertel, Director of MDHHS, claimed that the state government is "working hard" to give support to the overwhelmed health care staffs in Metro Detroit and Grand Rapids, "but we need every Michigander to do their part by getting vaccinated, wearing a mask in public indoor settings regardless of vaccination status, social distancing and staying home and getting tested if they have symptoms."

On November 19, the department issued a "public health advisory" specifying that "all persons in public indoors settings are advised to wear a face mask, regardless of their vaccination status," and that "public

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establishments are advised to implement masking policies and encourage compliance with such policies." Meanwhile, the advisory said, that those who are not fully vaccinated or "who are immunocompromised are advised to avoid large crowds or gatherings."

Both the inadequate commitment from the Biden White House—less than four dozen medical personnel sent to just two hospitals in Michigan—as well as the abdication of responsibility by the Whitmer administration for any emergency measures to meet the spiraling crisis are proof that the Democrats are just as responsible as the Republicans in allowing the pandemic to spread.

The complicity of the governor's office in facilitating the surge is only outdone by the executive management of the state's leading health care providers. In the MDHSS press release announcing federal assistance in Michigan, Beaumont Health CEO John Fox and Spectrum Health President and CEO Tina Freese-Decker were given prime billing.

CEO Fox says that he "deeply" appreciates the "much-needed" support from Whitmer and Biden and that "the pandemic is not over by any means." Freese-Decker, speaking "on behalf of our physicians, team members and patients," says she is "grateful for the Department of Defense medical team" as "we take every measure to care for our community."

Reading this public relations bluster from the state government on behalf of two multi-billion-dollar health care conglomerates in Michigan, no one would know that Fox and Freese-Decker and their respective executive teams have been preoccupied over the past six months with merger negotiations.

Far from "taking every measure" to care for the community, the leadership of Beaumont Health and Spectrum Health has indeed been acting like the pandemic is over and focusing all their energy on creating what would be the largest health care system in the state with a combined revenue of more than $12 billion.

It is no accident that the two hospital systems, which includes the insurance monopoly Priority Health, that are receiving federal staffing support are those who are currently working with the Federal Trade Commission to gain regulatory approval of their merger and acquisition deal.

The response to the pandemic in Michigan and throughout the US and internationally cannot be left in the hands of the political representatives of the corporate and financial elite who are committed to allow the virus to spread among the public through "herd immunity" and thoroughly inadequate mitigation measures.

The fight for a strategy of eliminating the pandemic must be mounted by the working class through independent action based on factory, school and neighborhood rank-and-file committees.

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