

COVID-19 must be eradicated to stop dangerous new variants

WSWS Editorial Board
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On Friday, the World Health Organization (WHO) warned of a new variant of COVID-19, which it termed Omicron, that spreads more rapidly than other variants and is potentially more deadly and resistant to vaccines.

The emergence of this new strain of COVID-19 is a devastating exposure of the policy implemented by capitalist governments, spearheaded by the United States and Europe, which have opposed lockdowns and other critical public health measures necessary to stop the spread of the disease.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and leading scientists have repeatedly warned that without the elimination and eradication of COVID-19, it is only a matter of time before new and more dangerous variants evolve.

On August 20 of this year, the WSWS wrote, “As long as the virus spreads it will continue to mutate into new, more infectious, lethal and vaccine-resistant variants that threaten all of humanity. Unless it is eradicated on a world scale, the embers of COVID-19 will continue to burn and create the conditions for the virus to flare up anew.”

These warnings have been vindicated, with disastrous consequences.

The Omicron variant, which is by far the most heavily mutated of any detected so far, has spread widely throughout South Africa, replacing other strains with unprecedented speed.

On Friday, the European Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warned, “In a situation where the Delta variant is resurgent” across Europe, “the impact of the introduction and possible further spread of #OmicronVariant could be VERY HIGH.” It concluded, “The overall level of risk for the EU/EEA... is assessed as HIGH to VERY HIGH.”

The WHO stated that the new variant poses an “increased risk of reinfection,” and that it is increasing in “almost all provinces of South Africa.” The variant has been “detected at faster rates than previous surges in infection, suggesting that this variant may have a growth advantage.”

“New variant = new pandemic” wrote Dr. Yaneer Bar-Yam, a complex system physicist who has been studying pandemics for nearly two decades. “Infections we know about today happened a few days to two weeks ago. Infections that happened today will only be known in a few days to two weeks from now.” He calculated that the new variant is six times more

infectious than the original strain and eight times more deadly.

Given how rapidly the disease has been spreading, scientists warned, there is no doubt it is present in countries throughout the world. “There is likely community transmission in Belgium,” said virologist Angela Rasmussen, “suggesting there’s also likely community transmission elsewhere.”

The emergence of the Omicron variant takes place against the backdrop of a catastrophic winter surge of the Delta variant of COVID-19. Worldwide, the number of cases has surged 40 percent in just one month. In Germany, the seven-day moving average of cases has reached 55,000, more than double the highest level ever recorded.

In the US, more than 1,000 people are dying every day, and Michigan, Minnesota and other states are recording the highest levels of new cases on record, despite the availability of vaccines.

Speaking Monday, Biden announced that there would be no measures taken in response to the new variant, other than travel restrictions from southern African countries. He declared, “We will continue to be guided by what the science and my medical team advises.”

This is a lie. Biden has not followed the advice of scientists—who have been warning that his policies would lead to a resurgence of the pandemic—but the profit interests of Wall Street.

Biden’s signature domestic policy, like that of Trump before him, was the reopening of schools, the most significant source of outbreaks according to statistics from the COVID hotspot of Michigan. Over the summer, the Biden administration urged the public not to wear masks, and it promoted the lie that children cannot catch or transmit COVID-19.

The fascistic right led by Trump, along with his counterparts internationally, has demanded the abandonment of public health measures, promoted conspiracy theories, and sought to discredit vaccination, a critical component of the fight to stop the pandemic.

Whatever their differences with the far right, Biden and other proponents of inadequate mitigation measures agree on the most essential question: that no measures can be taken that impinge on the wealth of the corporate and financial elite. Their criminal and unscientific claim that the pandemic could be

stopped through vaccination alone has been exposed with the emergence of the Omicron variant.

The major US newspapers, speaking for the financial oligarchy that dominates American society, have responded to the emergence of the Omicron variant with a campaign against public health measures. “Americans and the rest of the world need to learn to live with an ever-mutating virus,” wrote the *Wall Street Journal*, which added, “The biggest danger is more government lockdowns.”

The *Washington Post* published a column by Megan McArdle, headlined, “The US must defend itself from the omicron variant—without resorting to lockdowns.”

“The costs of further lockdowns would be heavy,” McArdle declared, “from eating disorders and opioid overdoses to small-business failures and schools falling behind... We must be more selective in our policies, opting for anti-covid measures that disrupt daily life as little as possible.”

How do these consequences—all of which could be prevented through the mobilization of social resources—compare to the deaths of millions of peoples? What McArdle, the *Post* and the entire ruling class really mean is that no measures can be taken that threaten the endless rise of the stock markets.

The Washington Post, Wall Street Journal and the rest of the media can talk themselves hoarse about COVID-19 going away on its own or turning into the flu, but this is real life, and the disease doesn’t care about their lies.

Workers must base their response not on the deluded and self-serving lies of the ruling class, but the scientific reality of the pandemic.

The working class, in the US and internationally, must intervene and demand the implementation of critical emergency measures to stop the pandemic, based on a strategy of elimination and eradication. This requires that:

- All non-essential production be immediately stopped until the disease is brought under control. All workers must receive 100 percent pay either for remote work or, when remote work is impossible, to fully compensate them for lost income.
- All self-employed tradesmen and tradeswomen, contractors and small business owners receive full compensation for all lost earnings resulting from the halting of non-essential production.
- All in-person education be immediately suspended and replaced with remote instruction. Billions of dollars must be made available to ensure that every child and adolescent is provided with his or her own modern laptop and high-speed internet service, along with a safe, spacious and comfortable learning environment at home.
- The public health system be massively expanded and tens of thousands of public health coordinators hired. Everyone infected with the disease, or exposed to it, must have immediate and timely access to public health staff, nurses and doctors who can monitor their symptoms and help them safely quarantine without infecting others.
- Trillions of dollars be allocated for the creation of a global

vaccination program. The distribution of vaccines must be administered by scientists and public health experts with a mandate to protect the whole world.

The resources for this emergency program exist. Since the start of the pandemic, US billionaires have become more than 60 percent wealthier, their fortunes swelled by massive cash handouts from the Federal Reserve. The wealth of Elon Musk alone has increased from \$30 billion at the start of 2020 to over \$300 billion now.

The entire policy of the ruling class has been built on a mountain of lies. At every point, from the initial emergence of the pandemic to the present, the ruling class has justified its homicidal measures by denying the reality of the threat and the measures that must be taken.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Parties affiliated with the International Committee of the Fourth International have initiated the Global Workers’ Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic. The Inquest will examine and refute all the lies promoted by governments and in the media over the past two years, an essential part of developing within the working class an understanding of what has happened and what must be done. The WSWs has already begun taking testimony from workers and scientists.

The Inquest must be connected to the organization and mobilization of the international working class as an independent force, through the formation of rank-and-file committees in every workplace and neighborhood. A change in policy will not be realized outside of a massive social and political movement to demand a strategy of global elimination and eradication.

The development of a movement in the working class raises the necessity of a confrontation with the entire ruling class and the capitalist system. The policy of the corporate and financial oligarchy has produced a catastrophe. The international working class must fight for socialism.



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