

Detroit schools reopen Monday as COVID-19 sweeps Michigan

Our reporters

28 November 2021

Public schools are to reopen Monday in Detroit after a weeklong break over the Thanksgiving holiday, despite the upsurge in COVID-19 cases which has killed an average of 500 people a week and put 4,000 people in the hospital on Thanksgiving Day.

Detroit schools closed the entire week, rather than the usual three-day break, because of rising COVID-19 case levels in the city and state, but school Superintendent Nikolai Vitti said in-person instruction would begin as usual on Monday, November 29.

While state health officials issued an appeal for all residents older than two to mask up during any indoor gatherings, this is not mandatory and will not be enforced in the school setting, where hundreds of thousands of children, few vaccinated and many unmasked, will gather in closed-door settings without adequate ventilation.

The state government headed by Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer has abandoned any effort to fight the right-wing campaign against mask mandates and other executive orders which she issued in the course of 2020, after the Republican-led state Supreme Court overturned those orders. The Republican-controlled state legislature opposes any effort to require vaccination or mask wearing in schools, workplaces or other public venues.

Over the past six months, state health officials have rescinded previous orders linked to fighting the spread of coronavirus and issued no new ones, while Whitmer's top health aide, Dr. Joneigh Khaldun, resigned.

The crisis in Michigan is so severe that it has attracted attention in the national media, with the *Washington Post* publishing a major report Saturday headlined, "'Really Heartbreaking:' Waves of Covid Patients Create No-Vacancy Status at Some Michigan

Hospitals.'

The report noted that eight hospitals in the state are 100 percent full and compelled to deny admission to new patients, with major hospital chains like Spectrum telling smaller rural hospitals that they cannot transfer high-risk patients who require treatment at a larger facility.

The result was increased risk of death, not only to COVID-19 patients, but to those suffering heart attacks or injuries from car accidents, or to those needing treatment in a facility with greater resources.

St. Joseph Mercy hospitals in Ann Arbor and Howell were among the eight that could not admit more patients to intensive care units.

A nurse at St. Joseph Mercy told the WSWs, "We are working short staffed with COVID patients now, and they just sent out bigger \$ incentives to come help 'decompress' the ER. It's horrible.

"I think the ICU need is getting worse since they paged for ICU/PCU nurses at a higher money incentive than normal COVID floors. You can tell it's surging a bit more this weekend."

Munson Healthcare, a chain of nine hospitals based in Traverse City, in the upper part of the lower peninsula, has delayed non-urgent surgeries and reduced clinic hours "to shift staff and resources to where they are needed most," according to an announcement by its chief medical officer.

A registered nurse at a community agency health facility, speaking to the WSWs, said, "I implore all to make sure you are wearing a mask around anyone who does not live in your house regardless of whether they are vaccinated or not. There is a huge uptick of breakthrough COVID cases in our area, and especially during holiday and winter months, the risk of getting COVID is increasing.

“Our local hospital is in crisis mode with no ER beds available. One in five patients has COVID in the hospital. Non-direct clinical staff are being pulled to direct care. Administrators are working to stock and deliver food/care items, transport patients in the hospital.

“As a hospice nurse I have had my hospice patients get COVID-19 from friends, family members, community members and care staff that were not religious in wearing a mask around them. Not one of those hospice patients lived, and all died from COVID infection, not their terminal illness.

“While vaccination lessens your chance of becoming gravely ill and requiring in-patient care it is not fool proof in insuring that is a given outcome. But please get vaccinated and always wear a mask with those who you do not live within your home. I am desperately not wanting to see any more people die from this illness.”

The Biden administration has responded to the Michigan crisis with a token gesture, sending 44 military medical personnel to a hospital in Grand Rapids and another in Dearborn to assist overworked and exhausted frontline health care workers.

The great danger is that filled ICUs today mean preventable deaths in a few weeks. According a recent study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, once hospitals reach 75 percent of ICU capacity nationwide, 12,000 additional deaths will likely result in two weeks. Once they reach 100 percent of capacity, that figure skyrockets up to 80,000. Michigan hospitals are at an average of 85 percent ICU capacity statewide.

Coronavirus cases in Michigan rose 86 percent from November 8 to November 22, according to the *Washington Post*, while two dozen states reported cases up at least 5 percent during that period. Michigan’s Thanksgiving Day total of just over 4,000 hospitalizations is approaching the state’s record of 4,640 set in April 2020.

While public schools are reopening Monday in Detroit and throughout the state, despite the spike in cases, at least two COVID-19 deaths of teachers were reported last week. Steven Schadeck, with 17 years’ service at Rockford Public Schools, died of complications linked to the virus. His last assignment was as a first grade teacher at Valley View Elementary School.

The Catherine Blackwell Institute, a specialty school for children on the east side of Detroit, reported that teacher Tracy Merritt, who had worked there for eight years, had died. Teachers said the cause of death was COVID-19.

The conditions in Michigan, among the first states affected by colder weather as winter approaches, are a warning sign to the rest of the United States, even before the impact is felt of the more transmissible Omicron variant of coronavirus.

The main driving force of the expanding pandemic is not the weather, however, but the abandonment of virtually all protective measures such as masking, without any serious opposition from the Democrats and with the frenzied encouragement from the Republicans.

In Michigan, for example, more than 100,000 people were crowded into Michigan Stadium in Ann Arbor, Saturday for the annual Michigan-Ohio State college football game. Another 75,000 attended the Michigan State-Penn State football game at Spartan Stadium in East Lansing. Both cities have high and rising rates of community spread of coronavirus, which will now be accelerated by these two superspreader events.

Opposition to the reopening of the schools to in-person instruction and the fight for a program of eliminating COVID-19 requires a political struggle by the working class against the two corporate parties and their right-wing, homicidal agenda. Teachers, parents and students who wish to join this struggle should attend the next online meeting of the Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee on Friday, December 3. To register, click here.



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