Michigan COVID-19 hospitalizations hit new pandemic record

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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.

Michigan continued as a major flashpoint of the pandemic in the US on Monday as the number of coronavirus patients in hospital beds in the state hit a new record since the public health crisis began approximately 20 months ago.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) updated its COVID-19 patient census following the Thanksgiving holiday weekend showing that 4,185 people were hospitalized with confirmed cases across the state and that 83 percent of bed capacity is now occupied.

The previous largest number of confirmed coronavirus hospitalizations was 4,158 and was set last April during the third wave of the pandemic in the state. Hospitalizations have been increasing steadily for 19 weeks, and the surge is associated with the Delta variant of the virus which has primarily singled out for infection those who are unvaccinated.

Hospitalizations began accelerating in early November and nearly doubled from a total of 2,249 in the space of four weeks. State health officials have said almost all the new infections requiring hospitalization are from the Delta variant of the virus. Meanwhile, there are now 139 children now hospitalized with COVID-19, another grim new record for the state.

A substantial majority of those being admitted to Michigan hospitals are unvaccinated. According to Dr. Dennis Cunningham, Henry Ford Health System Director of Infection Control and Prevention, there are a small number of vaccinated people coming into the hospital with COVID-19, “but they have immune systems that don’t work really well either because they’re the elderly or have underlying medical problems like cancer or an organ transplant.”

Dr. Matthew Sims, director of infectious diseases research at Beaumont Health, said that the patients coming into the system’s hospitals are “almost exclusively unvaccinated,” and the numbers of these patients “in the last couple of days have gone up.”

The most recently available 30 days of data from MDHHS (from October 14 to November 12) shows that 72 percent of cases, 71 percent of hospitalizations and 75 percent of deaths were individuals who had not been fully vaccinated.

There are seven hospitals that are 100 percent full with COVID-19 patients that are spread across the state, including Detroit Receiving Hospital, Ascension Standish, MidMichigan Medical Center in Alma, Promedica Hospital Monroe and Saint Joseph Mercy Health in Ann Arbor. There are another 22 hospitals that are above 90 percent full.

Along with the surge in hospitalizations, the percentage of people testing positive for the virus has risen to 18.7 percent, a level not seen since the first days of the pandemic when there were no vaccines available.

While new more infectious variants such as Omicron, first discovered in South Africa, now spreading rapidly around the globe, the situation in Michigan is a leading indicator of the catastrophic public health situation unfolding across the US.

With Michigan Republican Party officials opposing any measures whatsoever to slow down or mitigate the

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spread of the virus, the Democrats, led by Governor Gretchen Whitmer, have completely surrendered to the politics of “herd immunity” from the far right.

Governor Whitmer was in Detroit on Monday and made it clear that no extraordinary action is forthcoming to stem the surging case numbers and hospitalizations or to prepare for the inevitable arrival of the more infectious, and very likely more deadly, Omicron variant.

Taking her lead from President Biden, who said that the Omicron variant is “cause for concern, not panic,” Whitmer told local media she was staying the course set when all economic restrictions were lifted at the beginning of the summer and enabled the present surge. “All the information is that these vaccines still hold up well against all the variants that have come and gone, but viruses mutate and that’s why wearing a mask while you’re inside is crucial.”

She went on, “Any COVID is too high especially when we have access to vaccines, and we know masking works.” Although she was not recorded on camera saying it, a reporter from ClickOnDetroit said that Whitmer said, “Look, we’re going to have to live with COVID and, considering the prevalence of the vaccine, it is preventable.”

A Department of Defense medical team will begin arriving in Grand Rapids on Tuesday as part of the deployment of two teams of 22 doctors, nurses and respiratory specialists to assist hospital staff in west and southeast Michigan.

Chad Tuttle, senior vice president of hospital operations for Spectrum Health, said the federal medical team is needed to help the system deal with a record high of 438 COVID-19 patients across its hospitals. “Our COVID census was at the highest level it has ever been; our staffing resources are as constrained as they’ve ever been and frankly, we’re running out of spaces to treat inpatients,” Tuttle said, adding that the state government has requested additional teams to be deployed to the Grand Rapids area.

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