

Two more Minnesota teachers die of COVID-19 as cases approach record highs

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Earlier this week, two more Minnesota teachers died from COVID-19. The deaths were announced by Education Minnesota on Tuesday, putting the total number of school staff confirmed killed in the state by COVID-19 at 18. At least two students have also died of the virus. Currently, no information has been released about the staff and students who have died, as well as the at least 400 hospitalizations from the virus among students and teachers.

The recent deaths are part of a massive surge in COVID-19 cases in Minnesota, placing it just behind Michigan as an epicenter of COVID-19 in the US.

As the deaths were reported this Tuesday, Minnesota reported 12,631 cases, the highest day recorded in 2021. Hospitalizations are approaching an all-time high at more than 1,600. Last month the Pentagon deployed emergency medical teams to assist overwhelmed hospitals at the request of Democratic Governor Tim Walz.

According to the Minnesota Department of Health, there have been 912,370 total recorded cases of COVID-19 in the state since 2020. Over 21 percent of COVID-19 cases occurred in people 19 years of age and under.

Since schools resumed for in-person learning in mid-August, the total number of cases in the state has risen by nearly 50 percent. According to state data, within the first two weeks of the school year, the number of schools with outbreaks tripled twice, reaching 94 outbreaks. Currently, over 400 schools in the state are on the Department of Health Outbreak list, meaning that outbreaks have quadrupled in the past weeks.

Contact tracing has plummeted with the reduction of contact tracing staff. When the school year began in September, contact tracing staff stood at 522, down from 1,993 in December even as the Delta variant

spread through schools and superspreader events were held, including the Minnesota State Fair.

Amid the continued rise in cases and deaths, the unions have not made a single effort to end in-person learning to stop the spread. This is because they are tied to the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party, Minnesota's branch of the Democratic Party, which is dedicated to keeping schools open to keep the flow of profits to the banks and corporations.

In response to the identification of the new Omicron variant, President Joe Biden declared that the US would not enact any additional protective public health measures against the spread of the virus. In response to this gesture directly to the ultra-rich, stock prices rose as record corporate profits had already been reported on Wall Street.

As scientists and experts have repeatedly warned, while the vaccines have proven to be a powerful weapon in fighting COVID-19, they are most effective as part of a broader health strategy aimed at elimination and eradication of the virus globally. Without this, a vaccine-only strategy leaves the possibility open for the emergence of more dangerous variants. The emergence of the Omicron variant, which has already been identified in Minnesota, makes this clear.

A fighting strategy to end the pandemic and save lives requires the closure of schools to in-person learning, the shutdown of all nonessential production with full compensation, mass testing and contact tracing, and safe isolation of those who have been infected in addition to global vaccine production and administration.

With the "profits before lives" strategy being pursued by the Biden administration, the pandemic will continue to rip through Minnesota, the Upper Midwest, and the US as a whole as winter sets in. The measures

necessary to stop the spread of the virus—and put a halt to the deaths of teachers and students—can only come through workers developing rank-and-file committees in every workplace and factory, in the US and internationally to enforce the shutdown of unsafe facilities and the closure of schools to in-person learning.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has launched the Global Workers' Inquest which will educate workers on the nature of the pandemic and expose those who are criminally responsible for it. The WSWWS is collecting testimonies from workers and scientists as part of an Inquest into the COVID-19 pandemic. Educators, students and parents in Minnesota should contribute to the work of this inquest and fight to bring the pandemic to an end.



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