

Three northeast states deploy National Guard amid nationwide pandemic surge

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The National Guard is being deployed in New York, Maine and New Hampshire in response to the steep rise in COVID-19 hospitalizations and dramatic declines in bed capacity at health care facilities in the three states.

The mobilization of the National Guard is taking place as the seven-day average number of cases has remained above 120,000 and the number of deaths above 1,300 each day in the US. As the new, more transmissible Omicron variant has been confirmed in 21 states, the Delta variant of the virus continues to spread across the country with a pronounced winter surge concentrated in the US Northeast and Midwest.

On CNN on Wednesday evening, epidemiologist Michael Osterholm explained that the entire US will see coronavirus case numbers surge in the coming weeks. Presently, 23 states have experienced an increase of 20 percent or more in the last two weeks.

Dr. Osterholm, the director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota, described the surges in the upper Midwest and Northeast as “dire.” He added, “But we expect to see other areas of the country also light up in the next several weeks.”

In New York state, the National Guard announced on Wednesday that 120 troops—Army medics and Air Force medical technicians—were being sent to 12 nursing homes and long-term care facilities across the state. The announcement said that the soldiers being selected have been trained in medical services but were not working in the field professionally.

The nursing home and long-term care facilities where the military personnel are being sent are in the cities of Syracuse, Rochester, Albany, Buffalo, Utica, Plattsburgh, Uniondale, Liberty, Vestal, Olean, Lyons and Goshen. New York Governor Kathy Hochul, a Democrat, issued an order for 60 National Guard teams

on December 1.

The deployment is being coordinated by the New York State Department of Health after 50 hospitals in northern New York reported less than 10 percent bed availability.

Maine Governor Janet Mills activated the National Guard on Wednesday in a directive that was accompanied by a press release that said the action was “to help alleviate short-term capacity constraints at hospitals and maintain access to inpatient health care services for Maine people amid a sustained surge of COVID-19.” The release went on to report that a record high 379 people were hospitalized with the virus in Maine, 117 of those in critical care and 60 on ventilators. There are now just 42 intensive care unit beds available in the state.

The Democratic governor’s directive activated up to 75 National Guard soldiers to be used in non-clinical support roles to expand health care capacity by equipping “nursing facilities and swing bed units” to accept discharged patients and relieve a “bottleneck” that will allow more people with COVID-19 and other serious health problems to be admitted into the hospitals. The military personnel will also help to “administer monoclonal antibodies to prevent serious illness from COVID-19 and keep Maine people out of critical care, preserving intensive care unit (ICU) capacity.”

The Maine governor also requested federal COVID-19 Surge Response Teams for two Maine hospitals under the Biden administration’s Winter Response Plan. “If approved, teams of Federal clinicians, including physicians, nurses, and certified nursing assistants, will supplement existing staff and members of the Maine National Guard to provide care for those with COVID-19,” the statement said.

The public health crisis in New Hampshire has reached critical proportions with both the number of active cases, 9,868, and the number of hospitalizations, 462, setting records since the beginning of the pandemic on Wednesday. The state now has the largest number of new cases per population in the country over the last 14 days, with 649.8 per 100,000 people.

At a press conference on Wednesday, Republican Governor Chris Sununu called on the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the National Guard to assist with the surge. Sununu said, “We reached out to FEMA to request some staffing assistance in our health care facilities.” He added that FEMA is providing 30 paramedics to help at hospitals and the first 24-person team is arriving, “as early as this weekend.”

There will also be a group of 70 National Guard soldiers sent into hospitals to assist with “everything from soup, food service or clerical tasks,” to help “flex their own internal staff for better coordination of effort and ultimately better health care services.”

Dr. Benjamin Chan, state epidemiologist for the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, also said in the press conference, “Over the last week we have averaged between 1,200 to 1,300 new infections each day ... Our test positivity rate continues to be high.” Chan said that hospitalizations and deaths are increasing, “unfortunately, we have 11 new deaths from COVID-19 to report today, bringing the total number of people that have died from COVID-19 to 1,768.”

Doctors and epidemiologists continue to report that more than 90 percent of the new cases and hospitalizations are unvaccinated individuals. Forty percent of the US population has not been fully vaccinated, and the number of doses administered each day is only half that in April—1.7 million compared to 3.3 million.

In the Midwest the surge continues to stress the health care system to the limits. In Michigan and Pennsylvania, the daily average of hospitalized patients remains at more than 4,500 people, an increase of 20 percent over the past two weeks. In Illinois and Indiana, hospitalizations are up 49 percent.

The eruption of COVID nearly two years after its first outbreak is not exclusively the result of low vaccination rates, or lack of mask mandates, but the direct product

of the strategy pursued by the ruling class in the US and throughout the world: “herd immunity” that places profits above human life. The Democrats and Republicans, as well as the capitalist media, wish to blame the present surge on the unvaccinated, because in this way they can paint the continued disaster of the pandemic as the result of the decisions of individuals instead of their own policies.

The fact is that the present explosion of cases, hospitalizations and deaths arises from the lifting of any restrictions in May even though the Delta variant was already on the rise and public health experts such as Dr. Osterholm were warning that the US was in the “eye of the hurricane” with a “Category 5” COVID-19 storm approaching.

Democratic and Republican governors are now mobilizing the National Guard, with virtually identical explanations, because the new wave of the pandemic is overwhelming the hospitals and health care systems, a wave that they themselves have helped to create.



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