

# Fourth Minnesota teenager dead from COVID-19

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Last Tuesday, another teenager died from COVID-19 in the state of Minnesota, marking the fourth death among teenagers aged 15–19 from the virus in the state and the second in less than a one-week period. This comes in the wake of two Minnesota teachers dying from COVID-19 at the end of last month.

The death of the unidentified teen is a tragic result of the latest surge in cases in Minnesota and the US. As of this reporting, Minnesota's test positivity rate on a seven-day average is up to 11.9 percent, which is well above the "high-risk" category for community transmission. The second case of the more infectious Omicron variant of COVID-19 has been confirmed in the state. The variant is already spreading through South Africa and Europe at a faster rate than the highly infectious Delta variant.

As of December 13, the seven-day average of hospitalizations in Minnesota from COVID-19 is 1,786, with 338 in intensive care. Additionally, the state is nearing capacity, with only 18 adult and seven pediatric ICU beds available. The official death toll as of December 13 has surpassed 10,000.

According to the Minnesota Department of Health, there have been 956,779 total recorded cases of COVID-19 in Minnesota so far, with over 21 percent of COVID-19 cases occurring in people 19 and under. Since schools reopened to in-person learning in August, the total number of confirmed cases has risen by over 50 percent in a matter of months, jumping from 600,000.

The surge in cases across the US has been primarily caused by the reopening of schools to in-person learning. Within weeks of opening for the new school year, outbreaks rose exponentially in schools, increasing nine-fold within two weeks. Currently, over 1,000 schools are on the Minnesota outbreak list.

Testing and reporting in Minnesota has also been drastically reduced, with cases only being reported every other day since July as part of Biden's declaration that the US had achieved "independence" from the pandemic. Additionally, contact tracing has plummeted, with the reduction of staff from nearly 2,000 last December to only 522 this August.

The Biden administration, along with the Democratic Party-aligned unions, have made it clear that they will enact no additional protective measures to prevent the spread of the virus, even as the Delta wave surges through schools in the state and across the US and Omicron rapidly spreads.

The ruling class and its media arms have joined in on a chorus prematurely declaring the arrival of the Omicron variant as "mild" or even the "end" of the pandemic as part of an attempt to keep workplaces and schools open to transmission and death. Even local media in Minnesota have been reckless with reporting on the accelerating Delta wave. Articles from the Minnesota-based *Star Tribune* have been reporting the rise in hospitalizations from the virus with repeated declarations that the surge is "slowing down" for months, despite daily cases rising to as high as 12,631 in recent days.

The second confirmed case of Omicron in the state serves as a warning to teachers, students and the working class in general. A recent study demonstrated that the Omicron variant evades vaccination, confirming the warnings of scientists, doctors, epidemiologists and virologists that vaccines alone could not put an end to the pandemic. Instead, vaccines can only be effective as part of a broader strategy of elimination and eradication of the virus globally. Without additional measures, a more dangerous variant, like Omicron, will emerge.

The measures needed to end the surge in Minnesota, across the US and internationally can only come through a mass movement of the working class, international and independent of the capitalist parties. In every workplace, factory and school, committees of workers must be built to carry out the shutdown of non-essential production, close schools to in-person learning to halt the transmission of the virus and prioritize safe working conditions over the profits of the capitalist class.

The development of a mass movement of the working class to eliminate COVID-19 requires that workers and young people are educated on the nature of the pandemic and how it has been allowed to spread and mutate into more dangerous variants. The Global Workers' Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic initiated by the *World Socialist WebSite* will provide the social and political groundwork for the mobilization of the working class to end the pandemic. The WSWS is taking testimonies from scientists, teachers, workers and young people as part of the Inquest into the pandemic. We urge readers to participate in the Inquest and take up the fight for socialism.



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