# Close schools and nonessential businesses! Workers must act to stop Omicron!

**Statement of the World Socialist Web Site Editorial Board**
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It has been three weeks since the World Health Organization (WHO) named Omicron a "variant of concern" and warned that the danger is "very high." In these three weeks, governments have done nothing, allowing the new variant of COVID-19 to spread uncontrolled throughout the world's population.

During those vital weeks, Omicron has spread silently, as infected individuals have unknowingly transmitted the extremely infectious virus to those around them. Now these imperceptible movements of the virus are manifesting themselves in unprecedented surges in case rates—the fastest seen anywhere since the beginning of the pandemic two years ago.

A preview of what is in store in every country is shown in the United Kingdom. Earlier this week, Omicron became the dominant variant in London. The UK posted a record 93,000 cases Friday, the third consecutive daily increase. Cases have surged to the highest level in the country's history, with overall COVID-19 cases rising 50 percent in just two days.

Responding to this development, virologist Trevor Bedford warned that the continued spread of Omicron would manifest itself in "skyrocketing caseloads."

Bedford warned that the current growth rate "corresponds to rates of epidemic doubling of between 2.3 days in the UK and 3.3 days in Germany." He continued, "I expect caseloads to climb suddenly and rapidly in a large number of well-connected cities over the next week. This will take many by surprise but was baked in as soon as we knew" the rate at which Omicron spread.

"The 4 countries with the highest documented Omicron burden [Denmark, Norway, the United Kingdom and South Africa] have each exceeded their pandemic record for new cases, and still ascending rapidly," wrote epidemiologist Eric Topol, professor of molecular medicine at Scripps Research Institute.

In the United States, test positivity in New York City, a hotbed of the Omicron variant, has doubled in just four days, up from 3.9 percent on December 9 to 7.8 percent on December 12, and the city has posted its highest number of cases ever.

The rapid spread has been coupled with a growing volume of data showing the enormous dangers of the new variant. Contrary to assertions by governments and media outlets that Omicron is a "friendly mutant," there is no evidence that the disease is "mild."

A preprint study by Imperial College London published Thursday found that Omicron cases are just as likely as Delta to lead to symptomatic infections and hospitalizations, and far more likely to cause reinfections.

The authors wrote, "The study finds no evidence of Omicron having lower severity than Delta, judged by either the proportion of people testing positive who report symptoms, or by the proportion of cases seeking hospital care after infection." They added, "Omicron was associated with a 5.4-fold higher risk of reinfection compared with Delta."

This outcome was entirely predictable, and it *was* predicted by the *World Socialist Web Site*. Responding to the WHO's announcement of a new "variant of concern," the WSWS warned two weeks ago, "The fact that the Omicron variant is far more infectious than Delta means that, even if it was somewhat less deadly—a claim that has no basis in fact yet—the larger number of cases will mean more hospitalizations and, if hospitals get overwhelmed, a massive increase in deaths."

However, governments around the world rejected the warnings of scientists, knowing full well that the failure to act would produce a disaster. Two weeks ago, US President Joe Biden proclaimed that the US government would not implement "shutdowns or lockdowns." He vowed to "reopen our country ... reopen our businesses" and … "reopen our schools."

Rather than taking emergency action to stop the new

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threat, the Biden administration has demanded the opposite: the further removal of restrictions. Yesterday, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention officially adopted the demand of Biden that children—including unvaccinated children—not quarantine if they are exposed to COVID-19.

The *New York Times* echoed this homicidal policy, declaring, "Covid Isn't Going Anywhere. It's Time We Started Acting Like It." The *Times* demanded that schools remain open despite the spread of the dangerous new variant and called for children not to be quarantined when exposed.

This policy is all the more criminal given that, according to data from South Africa, the Omicron variant appears to be particularly dangerous for children. As many as five percent of children infected with the Omicron variant of COVID-19 have been hospitalized.

Just as the entire media and political establishment conspired in January–March 2020 to keep the public from knowing the extent of the danger posed by the first COVID-19 wave, so too, the surge of Omicron has been accompanied by a massive propaganda barrage aimed at downplaying the threat and chloroforming public opinion.

In just two weeks, all of the lies of the government and media have been exposed. Omicron is not "mild," and it is not "manageable." The irresponsible policies being carried out today will result in a wave of deaths in January and beyond. The "vaccine only" approach of capitalist governments has, far from bringing about an end to the pandemic, massively undermined the effectiveness of vaccines themselves.

The insanity of this policy is proven in the fact that, even as the Biden administration is doubling down on its commitment to keeping schools and businesses open, restaurants, bars, concert venues and schools are shutting down around the country in response to massive local outbreaks. Rather than being implemented in a coordinated, rational and systematic way, such actions are improvised after the spread of the virus has already reached such a point that it is infecting broad sections of the population.

Urgent action is needed now! An immediate shift in policy is necessary. A Zero COVID policy— aimed at the elimination of Sars-CoV-2—must be implemented immediately.

This policy is not unrealistic. It has been implemented successfully in China. What is unrealistic, or more precisely, utterly irrational, is the conception that it is possible to "live with" COVID-19, based on the hope that the virus will soon become manageable and miraculously fade away. The continuation of this irrational policy, which has been dictated by corporate-financial interests, will result in the unnecessary and avoidable loss of millions of lives.

The working class, in the US and internationally, must intervene and demand the implementation of critical emergency measures to stop the pandemic, based on a strategy of elimination and eradication. This requires the temporary closure of schools and nonessential workplaces with social support for all affected workers, combined with mass testing, contact tracing, the safe isolation of infected patients, the provision of high-quality masks, the rapid vaccination of the world population and other public health measures.

Ending the pandemic is not a purely medical question. The measures necessary to stop the spread of the virus are known and understood. The principal obstacle is the ruling class, whose economic interests are in conflict with science and life.

This is why the fight against the pandemic must be connected to a mass social and political movement in the international working class aimed at a fundamental transformation of the economic structure of society. Workers must build rank-and-file committees at every school and workplace, independent of the corporatist unions that have served as critical instruments in enforcing the homicidal policy of the ruling class.

These committees must organize workers to enforce the shutdown of nonessential production and the closure of schools. The working class must repudiate the principle that has determined government policy throughout the pandemic, that private profit comes before saving lives.

The emergence of the Omicron variant and its rapid spread throughout the world prove the urgency of the Global Workers' Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic initiated by the *World Socialist Web Site*. We call on workers and youth to build support for the work of the Inquest, and we appeal to scientists and all those active in the sphere of public health to provide information and professional assistance in advancing its work.

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