

The Omicron surge: Scientific facts vs. Biden's fictions

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The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported yesterday a staggering 288,579 new COVID-19 cases in the United States, the second highest daily case total ever, as the Omicron variant is spreading at an unprecedented rate throughout the country.

Amidst this catastrophic new phase of the pandemic, US President Joe Biden delivered a national address yesterday afternoon that combined lies, distortions, contradictions and no small amount of self-delusion. He did not advance a single concrete proposal that would meaningfully reduce the spread of the virus.

Biden's entire speech was built around the narrative that the pandemic is a problem of the unvaccinated, attempting to transform the partial truth—that those who are unvaccinated are at the greatest risk—into an entirely false claim that those who are vaccinated are safe, and that no additional public health measures are required aside from encouraging more vaccination.

“If you are not fully vaccinated, you have good reason to be concerned,” Biden said. “You're at a high risk of getting sick. And if you get sick, you're likely to spread it to others, including friends and family. And the unvaccinated have a significantly higher risk of ending up in a hospital or even dying.”

But Biden said those who are vaccinated “have much, much less reason to worry. You have a high degree of protection against severe illness.” Biden added that COVID-19 cases in vaccinated people “are highly unlikely to lead to serious illness” and that vaccinated people are “protected from severe illness and death.”

Even if one were to accept this claim as true, the fact is that only 61 percent of the American population is “fully vaccinated,” currently defined as having two doses of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine or one dose of Johnson & Johnson. Those who are not fully vaccinated include a large majority of children (only 16.7 percent of children between the ages of 5 and 11 have even one dose of the vaccine) and those who are infants up to the age of five, for whom no vaccine is available.

Even this, however, understates the gravity of the situation. The ability of the Omicron variant to evade existing vaccines means that being “fully vaccinated” requires having a third,

“booster” shot. Only 18 percent of the American population have had a booster. There is even discussion now that to be protected against the Omicron variant requires not a third, but a fourth shot, which Israel has now approved for people 60 years or older four months after their third shot.

Biden's main message was to call on the American population to get vaccinated and to get their boosters. “People with booster shots are highly protected,” he said. “Join them, join us.”

Even if the entire unvaccinated population and unboosted population were to follow his advice today, however, it would take two weeks for the impact of the vaccines to take full effect. Meanwhile, the virus will infect, at the current rate, millions of people. It is the equivalent of telling people in a burning building to quietly finish their lunch and then go down to the local hardware store to buy a fire extinguisher.

Moreover, the entire presentation of the issue by Biden is based on a lie—that only the unvaccinated need to worry about the massive surge in new cases.

Biden accepted as inevitable that millions of people will be infected. “We'll see some fully vaccinated people get COVID, potentially in large numbers. There will be positive cases in every office, even here in the White House, among the vaccinated—from Omicron.” However, those who are vaccinated, Biden claimed, are “highly unlikely” to get seriously ill.

But the virus targets society, not individuals. With new infections numbering in the millions, even a small percentage of serious illnesses and deaths can produce a catastrophe.

A recent analysis by ABC News of data from 34 states found 16,700 deaths from breakthrough infections between April and November of this year, with 20 percent of all deaths in those states being vaccinated people. If that figure is representative of the entire country, that means that 300 vaccinated people are dying every single day in the United States. And these deaths took place before the current surge of the Omicron variant, which is far more resistant to vaccines.

Biden's speech was constructed to justify a position that there must be no change in policy, no matter how rapidly the virus spreads. He particularly stressed keeping schools open for in-person learning, which is necessary to allow parents to stay

at work.

“We must also keep our K-12 schools open,” Biden said. “The science is clear and overwhelming. We know how to keep our kids safe from COVID-19 in school. ... Children are as safe in school as they are any place.”

This is another lie. To the extent that data exists, including in the state of Michigan, it has shown that schools are a major source of broader community outbreaks. Every serious study on the subject has shown that closing schools massively reduces community transmission of COVID-19.

The reopening of schools in the fall, amidst the surge of the Delta variant, has driven a sharp rise in infections and deaths among children. Over 1,000 children have already died from the disease, half of whom succumbed in the last four months.

The spread of the Omicron variant in South Africa and the UK has led to a sharp rise of hospitalizations among children, particularly infants under the age of five, for whom there is no vaccine. Addressing himself to parents terrified that their young child could catch COVID-19, Biden merely said, “One thing you can and must do, get yourself fully vaccinated and boosted, as well as those around you.”

However, even vaccinated and boosted adults can contract the virus, as Biden himself acknowledged, meaning that they can transmit it to their infant children.

Biden also advised that the millions of Americans traveling and gathering in groups for the holiday season should make no changes in their plans. “I know some Americans are wondering if you can safely celebrate the holidays with your family and friends,” he said. “The answer is yes... If you are vaccinated, and particularly if you have a booster shot. You should be comfortable celebrating the holidays as you planned it.”

Again, vaccinated individuals can transmit the virus, which means that even if only “fully vaccinated” people travel and congregate over the holidays, the airplanes and the homes of potentially millions of people will become “super-spreaders” for Omicron. Biden’s encouragement for the population to gather over the holiday “is not only misinformation. It’s premeditated social murder,” commented epidemiologist Seth J. Prins.

Perhaps the biggest lie of all was Biden’s claim that the country is in a far better position today than in March 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic. In March 2020, there were less than 1,000 deaths from COVID-19. Today, there are more than 800,000. The daily death toll then stood at less than 100; today it is over 1,200.

As for Biden’s claim that there has been a significant improvement in the health care infrastructure, even at current levels, the surge of the Omicron variant has already overwhelmed testing and contact tracing capabilities in the United States, with rapid test kits in short supply and lines at testing facilities. The US medical system has been massively degraded by two years of the pandemic, with its medical staff burnt out and many afflicted by post-traumatic stress disorder

(PTSD).

Finally, Biden claimed that this entire situation was unforeseen and unforeseeable. “I don’t think anybody anticipated that this was going to be as rapidly spreading as it did.” The president must take the American people for fools. Scientists and epidemiologists, along with the *World Socialist Web Site*, have been warning for over a year that the continued transmission of the virus would lead to the evolution of new, more infectious strains.

All of these lies and falsifications were intended for one audience: Wall Street. Biden’s task was to ensure the corporate and financial elite that no measures would be taken that undermined profit and the endless accumulation of wealth by the ruling class. Wall Street responded to his remarks with enthusiasm, with the Dow Jones Industrial Average rising 560 points (1.6 percent) yesterday.

At this point, the most reliable indicator that anything serious was being done to save lives would be a sell-off on the markets. But this requires the intervention of the working class. Biden’s policy of “living with COVID-19,” repeated in its essentials in every major capitalist country, must be rejected.

The working class must fight for a policy of “Zero COVID,” that is, the elimination and eventual eradication of the virus. That such a strategy is viable is proven by the case of China, which has limited deaths in a country of 1.4 billion to less than 5,000 over the past two years. It has been rejected in the US and the major capitalist countries because the necessary public health measures to implement it—including the shutdown of nonessential production and the closure of schools, combined with mass testing, contact tracing and vaccination—go against the interests of the corporate and financial oligarchy.

This is why the fight for this strategy must be taken up by the working class, through the formation of rank-and-file committees to demand and enforce the necessary measures to save lives, and through the development of a revolutionary movement against the ruling elites and the entire capitalist system.



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