

IHME projects 3 billion COVID-19 infections worldwide by March 2022

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In a startling assessment, the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington has projected that the world will see three billion COVID-19 infections over the next three months, nearly all of the highly transmissible Omicron variant.

As many as 35 million people a day will contract COVID-19 during the month of January, the IHME projected, while the US peak would be as high as 1 million a day.

The US share of total infections is projected at 140 million, nearly three times the number of infections officially reported since the beginning of the pandemic in January 2020.

These figures are a stark warning to working people in America and throughout the world that capitalist governments are systematically lying about the pandemic. They are engaged in a desperate attempt to keep the financial markets afloat, no matter what the cost in disease and death.

If such figures were openly discussed in the media—the IHME’s projection has been largely buried—the Biden administration and its counterparts around the world would be asked what they intend to do about such a massive and deadly danger. But they intend to do nothing.

The IHME estimate is a projection based on the phenomenal increase in the transmissibility of SARS-CoV-2 in its Omicron variant, in which the reproduction rate is double that of the Delta variant, and an even greater multiple of the infection rate of the original “wild” virus first identified in Wuhan, China.

Dr. Christopher Murray, a professor of health metrics sciences at the University of Washington and director of the IHME, told a press briefing that the world would likely see “an enormous surge in infections” between

now and the end of March.

The 3 billion projected infections “is about the same number of infections that have occurred in the last two years, so we are having a compressed transmission cycle,” he added.

According to figures presented at the White House coronavirus task force briefing Wednesday, Omicron accounted for 0.1 percent of all US COVID-19 infections just over three weeks ago, in the week ending November 27. The weekly figures climbed to 0.6 percent on December 4, 12.6 percent on December 11, and 73.2 percent on December 18—rising sixfold each week.

The percentage rate is significant, but so is the spread of the pandemic overall. Omicron made up 0.1 percent of a much smaller number of cases. It reached 73.2 percent of a much larger number. On Tuesday and Wednesday total new cases topped 200,000 each day.

Last winter’s surge peaked at 250,000 a day during January 2021. The IHME projects that reported infections will top 400,000 during January 2022, while the actual number will rapidly exceed 1 million a day.

The much-touted “mildness” of Omicron merely means that initial data suggests that it may be somewhat less lethal than Delta, although this is far from conclusive. But given the much wider spread, the impact in terms of both hospitalizations and deaths from Omicron could well be an order of magnitude greater.

Even if the hospitalization rate is significantly lower than that of Delta, with a million people a day being infected, the numbers going to the hospital will rapidly overwhelm the US health care system that is already on the brink of breakdown.

At the White House briefing Wednesday, CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky and chief health

adviser Dr. Anthony Fauci sought to put a good face on the figures showing a rapid increase in the number of infections, while they said nothing—and were not asked—about the projections of the IHME, which has been frequently cited as authoritative by both government scientists and the corporate media.

Fauci claimed that research findings from Scotland and South Africa, showing a lower rate of hospitalization due to Omicron, compared to Delta, was “good news.” The IHME model, however, already incorporates the data from Scotland and South Africa, Dr. Murray said.

He did admit the ominous implications of the far greater transmissibility of Omicron, saying, “even if you have a diminution in severity, if you have a much larger number of individual cases, the fact that you have so many more cases might actually obviate the effect of it being less severe.”

Walensky, Fauci and White House COVID-19 Response Coordinator Jeffrey Zients all sought to reinforce the message of complacency delivered by President Joe Biden in his nationally televised speech on Tuesday. They reiterated Biden’s claims that there was essentially no risk from Omicron for those who were vaccinated. These people could go ahead with planned travel and family get-togethers over the holiday season.

This flies in the face of scientific findings that Omicron has greatly increased the ability of SARS-CoV-2 to evade vaccines, and that only those who have received booster shots—only 20 percent of American adults—have sufficient antibodies in their system to give them effective protection against the new variant.

There are many signs of the mounting crisis in the health care system and more generally throughout American society as Omicron has become the dominant variant. According to an analysis by NBC News of data from the Department of Health and Human Services, hospitalizations in the United States have risen 39 percent from November 1 to December 21. This demonstrates primarily the long-term impact of the Delta variant, before Omicron became dominant.

The two largest hospital groups in the Detroit metropolitan area, Beaumont Health System and Henry Ford Health System, warned Tuesday that they faced an imminent crisis, with hundreds of COVID-19 patients needing treatment and hundreds of hospital workers

testing positive for the virus and compelled to quarantine. Henry Ford said that only 70 out of 1,500 beds were vacant and available. The two systems had about 1,000 COVID-19 patients between them, nearly all of them infected with the Delta variant, not yet Omicron.

Dr. John Deledda, chair of the Department of Emergency Medicine at the Henry Ford Health System, told the *Detroit News* that emergency departments are experiencing ‘unsustainable operating conditions’ throughout the state, and “we don’t know what omicron is going to bring us.” He added, “The infrastructure of our health care system, not just here at Henry Ford but across the state of Michigan, is at a tipping point.”

At the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio, Omicron patients now make up half of all COVID-19 hospitalizations, according to a spokesman, Dr. Abhijit Duggal, the vice chair of the medical center’s critical care department. “It’s been nonstop, like where we have been running at more than 100 to 120 percent capacity in most ICUs and emergency rooms,” he said, adding that in northeastern Ohio there is “a complete regional almost shutdown in terms of not being able to move patients around because everything is full right now.”

Despite the Biden administration’s determination to keep all schools open, backed up by the two teachers unions, the impact of Omicron is beginning to force districts to respond. On December 18, the Prince George’s County school district in the Maryland suburbs of Washington D.C., one of the largest in the country, announced it was shifting its 136,000 students to virtual classes until at least January 18.



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