

Life expectancy in the US dropped by an astounding 1.8 years during the first year of the pandemic

Benjamin Mateus
22 December 2021

During his live televised speech regarding Omicron's dominance in the United States on Tuesday, President Joe Biden claimed that the country was in a far better position now than in March of 2020. This blatantly false assertion was exposed the next day when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that Americans' life expectancy fell 1.8 years (from 78.8 to 77.0) in the course of 2020, 0.3 years more than their interim estimate of July 2021. The COVID-19 pandemic has been the cause of the most significant drop in life expectancy in the US since World War II, 75 years ago.

Last year more than 3.3 million people died in the United States, the highest such number at any point in the country's history. By comparison, in 2019 and 2018, 2.85 and 2.84 million died, respectively. COVID-19 deaths were attributable for three-quarters of the overall life expectancy decline in 2020 and 11 percent of annual deaths.

By comparison, China's life expectancy has climbed from 76.91 years in 2019 to 76.96 in 2020 and 77.13 in 2021. Their pursuit and strict adherence to a dynamic Zero COVID policy limited the death toll to 5,000 during the initial outbreak. Only three people have reportedly died of COVID-19 since April 2020, and as a consequence, it is likely that this year China, still a relatively poor country, will surpass the United States in life expectancy for its citizens.

As a trigger event in world history, the pandemic magnifies every social contradiction of capitalism in its advanced state of decay. For instance, during the pandemic, the two-decades-long opioid crisis saw deaths jump 30 percent from 2019 to 2021 with deaths attributed to accidental overdoses exceeding 100,000.

Still, as staggering as these statistics for 2020 are, 2021 has proven even more deadly. The US COVID-19 death toll by the last week of December 2020, according to the *Economist*, stood at 340,878 and excess deaths at 528,185. One year later, the magazine's dashboard placed the COVID-19 reported deaths at 810,000 and excess deaths between 1.0–1.1 million. This suggests there will be an even more significant drop in life expectancy in the first year of Biden's presidency than during the last year of Trump's.

According to a report published yesterday by *USA Today*, "Nationwide, nearly one million more Americans have died in 2020 and 2021 than in normal, pre-pandemic years, but about 800,000 deaths have been officially attributed to COVID-19, according to the CDC data. A majority of those additional 195,000 deaths are unidentified COVID-19 cases. Public health experts have long suggested [this], pointing to the unusual increase in deaths from natural causes."

Coronavirus has become the third leading cause of death in the US, behind heart disease and cancer. More than 203,000 people between 18 and 65 have died during the pandemic, and it was the leading cause of death for people aged 45 to 54. One in 400 people of all ages have died from COVID-19, and among those 65 and older, one in 100.

Each week since August 12, 2021, more than 100,000 children have been infected with COVID-19. They have consistently accounted for nearly one-quarter of all infections. Since the onset of the pandemic, almost 7.4 million children have tested positive for COVID-19. According to the CDC, at least 1,017 children under 18 have died from COVID-19, a level

nearly twice the average flu mortality and in the top 10 leading causes of death for this age category. Severe multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C) continues to climb. Almost 6,000 have developed this menacing illness, and 52 have died in the US.

Hospitalization rates among children, who are, for the most part, the largest constituent of the unvaccinated, have climbed higher than at any other time in the pandemic. Though children fare much better than adults, they remain at risk for chronic complications posed by Long COVID that can affect a small subset of children. These, by the sheer scale of infections due to Omicron, will pose significant challenges with uncertain long-term consequences.

Biden, and the press corps surrounding him, did not once touch on the impact the pandemic has had on children who have been orphaned and won't be sharing holiday celebrations with their loved ones and caregivers. A daunting 120,000-plus children have lost a parent or grandparent who was a primary provider or financial support, and another 22,000 have lost a secondary caregiver.

"Are these children better off, Mr. President? Wouldn't we have all been better off if in March 2020 we had eliminated COVID once and for all and prevented such a colossal loss of life?" These would have been appropriate follow-up questions. But no one asked them.

Indeed, in just three weeks, when the incidence of Omicron was far less than one percent of all sequenced strains, it now accounts for more than 73 percent of all COVID-19 cases in the country. By all accounts, the US trails the UK by around two weeks, which means events there have significant relevance to what the population can soon expect in the US.

In London, the epicenter of the Omicron wave in the UK, hospitalizations have tripled since a month ago. This means that state after state in the US can expect a potentially sudden and alarming rise in emergency room visits. Two years into the pandemic, with repeated assaults on their capacity to care for patients, health systems have been left destitute.

In a recent email by the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio to their medical and ancillary staff, where the state's health care is facing calamity brought on by the surge of infections, they offer this sobering assessment:

This past month has been sobering for many of us in healthcare. Nearly two years after the COVID-19 pandemic began, we're seeing some of the highest volumes of patients with the disease in hospitals throughout the Midwest. Here at Cleveland Clinic, we're caring for more than 800 patients with COVID-19 at our Ohio hospitals. Of these, more than 200 are in the intensive care unit. The majority of these patients are unvaccinated. Our Ohio emergency departments are filled. We have people waiting to get into our hospitals. Neighboring hospitals in our communities are facing the same issues. We've had to postpone many non-urgent surgeries in Ohio as we try to leave enough space for patients with COVID-19. Our physicians, nurses, and caregivers are working around-the-clock to care for these sick patients. They are exhausted.

Despite the grim news on the decline in life expectancy, stocks traded higher on the President's announcement that there would be little done in the way of impeding the surge of infections. Having recouped all their losses from Monday when Omicron's dominance was announced, yesterday the Dow closed 261 points up at 35,753.

As comparisons between China and the US show, the drop in life expectancy is a purely political phenomenon attributable to the policies the ruling elites have employed that continue to place profits over lives, as evidenced by the financial aristocracy's trillions amassed.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact