

Urgent action is necessary to stop viral transmission, save lives and end the pandemic

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Falsey and irresponsibly reassured by President Biden and the media, millions of people are traveling throughout the United States to celebrate the holiday with their families and friends. They have been misled about the nature of the pandemic, the drop in efficacy against infection of available vaccinations, and the risk of exposure to the virus. A terrible price will be paid for the refusal of the Biden administration to take the public health measures that are necessary to stop viral transmission. There is a grave danger that millions will be infected. Countless thousands will become seriously ill, suffer long-term consequences and even die.

Only one month since news broke of a new variant in southern Africa, Omicron has spread with unprecedeted speed throughout the world. It has already surpassed the Delta variant globally and is driving almost vertical spikes in cases, particularly in Europe and the United States.

According to projections from numerous scientists, a disaster is unfolding that will dwarf all previous surges of the pandemic. This week, the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) forecast that as many as 3 billion people, roughly 38 percent of the world's people, could become infected with Omicron in the next three months.

Despite the claims in the media and the political establishment, there is no evidence that the Omicron variant is significantly less severe than previous strains. Data published out of the UK on Thursday showed that a lower percentage of those infected with Omicron are hospitalized. But this is largely a byproduct of the fact that Omicron is infecting at a far higher rate those who have been vaccinated or have already had COVID-19, and, therefore, have greater resistance to the virus.

The "intrinsic severity" of Omicron, epidemiologists warn, appears to be the same or only slightly milder than Delta. Because Omicron is far more transmissible, this means it will lead to a far higher total number of people getting sick and dying from the disease.

A substantial portion of the world's population remains entirely unprotected from the coming tsunami of infections. An estimated 43 percent of the global population have not received a single dose of vaccine, while only 5.7 percent has received a third dose to provide adequate protection against Omicron. Those with only two doses of vaccine are largely unprotected from infection. Their risk of hospitalization and death remains to be determined but is believed to gradually increase after six months.

If the average infection fatality rate of unvaccinated and vaccinated people is roughly 0.5 percent globally, then 15 million people would die from the coming wave of infections and hospitalizations. Due to the rapid surge of infections, hospital systems globally will become overwhelmed, leading to a potentially far greater fatality rate and number of excess deaths, with less developed countries experiencing the worst outcomes.

Omicron poses a far greater risk than previous variants to children, especially those under five years old who are unvaccinated, globally. Data from South Africa and the United Kingdom show record numbers of child hospitalizations, indicating that Omicron could be at least 20 percent more severe among children. Over three times as many children have died at the

start of the Omicron surge in South Africa compared to previous variants.

The ruling class is responding to this unfolding disaster with criminal indifference. Death is being trivialized. Nowhere is this clearer than in the United States where, even prior to the impact of Omicron, more than 1,000 people are dying every day.

In his speech earlier this week, US President Joe Biden declared that there would be no change from the "vaccine-only" approach of the American government. In claiming that the US is in a much better position now than in March 2020 when the pandemic began, Biden did not even acknowledge that more than 830,000 people have died during this period, including more than 400,000 since he became president.

In the media, the death of approximately 10,000 people every week goes largely unmentioned. Two weeks ago, when tornadoes ripped through the US and killed nearly 100 people, the country was genuinely shocked by the tragedy. But the media barely reports that more than 10 times as many people are dying every day from COVID-19.

What accounts for the difference in reporting? The tornado can be reported as a freak occurrence, with limited consequences and implications in terms of national and global social policies.

But the pandemic is a catastrophe of a vastly greater magnitude, affecting the entire planet and requiring an immediate and massive allocation of economic resources and a fundamental change in social priorities. The implementation of the policies and actions necessary to end the pandemic are viewed by the financial-corporate capitalist elites and the governments they control as incompatible with their class interests.

That is why the media, both in the US and Europe, is promoting the conception that COVID-19 will never be eliminated and that it will persist for years to come. The pandemic will become endemic. The *Wall Street Journal* spelled this out bluntly in an article published Thursday:

The Omicron variant's aggressive advance is the latest twist in the course of a disease that public-health experts say is on a path toward becoming endemic in the U.S.

In other words, the Covid-19 pandemic won't have an end date. Rather, a crisis that engulfed the world within months of the coronavirus's discovery in China will dissipate in fits and starts into something that feels more like normal over the course of years, infectious-disease experts say.

Describing what persistence of COVID-19 as an endemic disease would actually mean, the *Journal* writes:

More than 1,200 people in the U.S. are dying of Covid-19 each day. But even at far higher levels of death and transmission than are typical for the flu, public-health experts say Covid-19's spread

will likely settle into a pattern predictable enough to be considered endemic.

The article concludes with a chilling statement by Andrew Noyes, an epidemiologist at the University of California, Irvine: "Covid is part of the woodwork now," he said. "It's part of the furniture."

This Nazi-like indifference to human life is the spirit that has guided the government's response to the pandemic.

The lives of countless millions of people cannot be held hostage to capitalist interests! An urgent change in policy is necessary if a catastrophe is to be averted. The vaccine-only approach that has become dominant throughout much of the world, particularly in the United States and Europe, has completely failed to address the crisis.

Vaccinations are a necessary component of efforts to contain the pandemic. The promotion of anti-vaccine sentiment by the fascistic right, which spearheaded the campaign against lockdowns, is thoroughly reactionary. Those who promote vaccine hesitancy imperil the lives not only of those who are unvaccinated but the population as a whole.

However, the current narrative that the pandemic is fundamentally a problem of the unvaccinated—promoted heavily by Biden on Tuesday—is false. Claims that the vaccinated face little danger to their health are entirely unsubstantiated. There is substantial evidence that even the completion of the two-shot regimen is ineffective against infection, with those infected suffering from Long COVID at comparable rates to those who are unvaccinated. In the face of a rapidly spreading virus, it is nothing less than criminal to limit actions to a long and drawn-out campaign for vaccinations that will do little to stop viral transmission in the days and weeks ahead.

The emergence of the Omicron variant, moreover, demonstrates that so long as the virus is allowed to circulate, there is the constant danger of the emergence of new, more infectious and vaccine-resistant variants. Furthermore, scientists warn that because Omicron is infecting huge numbers of people in such a short time span, it will accelerate the rate of mutation.

Mass vaccination is only effective if it is combined with aggressive public health measures aimed at stopping transmission and eliminating and eradicating the virus once and for all.

What is done in the next days and weeks is critical. Every public health measure must be deployed to stop the spread of the virus and save lives. A Zero COVID strategy must be implemented in every country, aimed at progressively eliminating SARS-CoV-2 in ever-broader geographic regions until all human-to-human transmission is stopped and the virus is eliminated globally.

This is achievable.

The ability of China, a country of 1.4 billion people, to limit deaths to under 5,000 and cases to 100,000 demonstrates that Zero COVID is viable. Its response to recent outbreaks—including emergency lockdowns, combined with mass testing, contact tracing and quarantining to break the chain of infection—demonstrates the types of measures that must be taken.

The Chinese authorities are currently confronting a significant outbreak in Xi'an, the capital city of China's Shaanxi Province, with 13 million residents. *Global Times*, a Chinese newspaper published in English, reports:

Starting Thursday, the 13 million residents in Xi'an were required to stay indoors. Only one family member of each household is allowed to leave the house to purchase daily necessities every two days. Other than special needs such as sickness or participating in anti-epidemic work, people are not encouraged to go outside.

The Xi'an Xianyang International Airport cancelled all domestic flights on Thursday. Chinese flight tracking platform Feichangzhun showed that 765 flights scheduled on Thursday were cancelled. Only three international flights at the airport remained as of press time. Trains to multiple cities were also suspended.

These measures impose significant temporary restrictions on individuals. But they are justified by the real threat to human lives, and their efficacy has been proven. The claim that such actions, which have mass popular support in China, are an unacceptable infringement on "personal freedom" is a cynical, lying justification for a policy that has led and will lead to the death of millions.

Modern science has shown that the closure of all nonessential workplaces and the transition to remote learning for all schools for a period of two months could quickly bring viral transmission under control and lay the basis for the full-scale elimination of COVID-19. These necessary lockdowns must be accompanied by the provision of full financial and social supports for all workers and small-business people affected.

Two-month lockdowns must be combined with the globally coordinated production and distribution of vaccines and high-quality masks to all countries, as well as the use of mass testing, contact tracing, the safe isolation and treatment of infected patients, and a dramatic expansion of health care infrastructure. At every essential workplace and hospital, workers must have access to the highest quality N95 or better masks, as well as modern filtration and ventilation systems. All nonessential domestic and international travel must cease immediately to allow for the elimination of the virus in each country.

With billions of people now able to access the internet, the conditions exist for a mass public education campaign to teach society the science of the pandemic. The science of airborne transmission must be broadly disseminated and reinforced on a daily basis, in particular, through educational programs on social media and television.

The guiding principle of the elimination strategy is that science and public health must take unconditional precedence over the financial markets and the profit interests of corporations. In the 21st century, the technology exists to quickly end the pandemic. But the response of world governments hearkens back to the 14th century, when the Black Death ripped through feudal society and killed nearly 100 million people.

As the world enters the third year of the pandemic, it is clearer than ever that ending the pandemic is not primarily a medical or scientific issue. It is a class question. For the ruling elite, the only number that matters is not the daily death toll, but the price of shares traded on Wall Street. Even amidst the unfolding disaster, the S&P stock market index closed at a record high on Thursday, fueled by the endless supply of money from the Federal Reserve and the pledge from Biden that nothing will be done that impinges on corporate profits.

For the ruling class, there is no limit on the number of dead that they are willing to accept. The limit will not come from above, but from below: through a mass social and political movement of the working class.

The working class must take matters into their own hands. There is a growing recognition among workers, drawn from the experience of the past two years, that their lives mean nothing to the capitalist ruling elites. "We are looked at the same way farm animals are looked at," one autoworker in Indiana remarked. "When we die, they will just hire more."

Workplaces and schools are centers for the transmission of the virus, while cases and deaths are being covered up by the corporations and the official trade unions. "So many workers are going home sick and there aren't enough workers to start shifts," another autoworker in Michigan told the WSWS. "The company and the union aren't doing anything to

inform us when a worker gets COVID, but we're finding out on our own, and we're talking to each other."

The Global Workers' Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic has been established by the *World Socialist Web Site* to break through the cover-up, falsifications and misinformation that have been deployed throughout the pandemic to justify policies responsible for the deaths of millions. The Inquest is gathering testimony from scientists and workers in all sectors to expose the conditions in workplaces and schools, which have functioned and continue to function as central areas for the transmission of COVID-19.

We are convinced that an understanding of the pandemic will lead to effective organization and action to stop the pandemic.

The Socialist Equality Party and *World Socialist Web Site* call for the formation of rank-and-file safety committees in workplaces, schools, public health facilities and neighborhoods.

Circulate this statement as broadly as possible directly and on social media. Organize discussions online and in workplaces. Demand the shutdown of non-essential production and an end to in-person learning. Do everything you can to alert your co-workers, friends and family about the developing danger and what must be done to stop it.

We make a special appeal to scientists and health care professionals: You have a responsibility to speak out. Publicize the facts, and inform the public. Support the Global Workers' Inquest by submitting testimony about the many different elements of the science of COVID-19 that have been covered up and denied. Many scientists have been fighting throughout this pandemic for an elimination strategy. Broader layers of scientists must be mobilized to speak out and clarify the public on the necessity for an urgent change in policy.

Only through the combined mass mobilization of millions of people, armed with a scientific understanding of the pandemic, will we be able to prevent the further needless infections, suffering and deaths of millions worldwide.



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