

CDC surrenders US population to the spread of Omicron

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As the Omicron variant of coronavirus surges exponentially and out of control, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced Monday afternoon a radical change in its isolation and quarantine guidelines, not to defend the American people from this impending disaster but to preemptively capitulate to it.

The CDC is cutting its recommendation of a 10-day isolation period for positive cases—itsself an arbitrary reduction from the 14 days recommended by epidemiologists—to five days of isolation, followed by five days of mask-wearing, for those without symptoms.

For those in contact with a positive case but not infected themselves, there was a similar cut in the recommended isolation period from 10 days to five days for those who are fully vaccinated, and to zero for those who have received booster shots.

Since asymptomatic people can be infectious for 10 days or even longer, this means that hundreds of thousands—and soon millions, given the exponential spread of Omicron—will be sent into workplaces to infect their co-workers.

Even those fully boosted have only 75 percent protection against Omicron. That means that if 60 million people who have received booster shots come into contact with a COVID-19 case and are sent back to work without even a day off, 15 million of them would be carrying the infection with them to spread.

CDC Director Rochelle Walensky openly admitted that an enormous surge in Omicron cases was taking place and that it was necessary loosen quarantine and isolation rules, which would otherwise take too many people out of the economy for too long.

“Not all of those cases are going to be severe. In fact many are going to be asymptomatic,” she told

the Associated Press. “We want to make sure there is a mechanism by which we can safely continue to keep society functioning while following the science.”

The reference to “following the science” is mere pretense. As for “society functioning,” this means only one thing under capitalism: maintaining the flow of profits to the capitalist class. Public health is being subordinated to corporate profit. Science is being junked to appease the howls of American business interests over the exodus of workers under the combined impact of the spread of Omicron and the perfectly justified fears of infection from the new variant.

The AP report, which cited Walensky’s remarks, made no effort to disguise the economic motivation, declaring, “The decision also was driven by a recent surge in COVID-19 cases, propelled by the omicron variant ... the sheer number of people becoming infected—and therefore having to isolate or quarantine—threatens to crush the ability of hospitals, airlines and other businesses to stay open, experts say.”

The CDC action was announced amid reports of a nationwide increase in the contagion and a particularly ominous rise in infections and hospitalizations among children, who appear to be more affected by Omicron than by previous variants of COVID-19. In New York City, child COVID-19 hospitalizations have quadrupled over the past three weeks, rising from 22 to 109. Nationwide, child infections rose to 170,000 last week, a rise of 28 percent, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics.

CDC figures showed that an average of 200 children a day were being admitted to the hospital for COVID-19, while a *Washington Post* analysis showed a total of 1,987 pediatric COVID-19 patients hospitalized nationally, a 31 percent jump in 10 days.

The average daily number of new cases is approaching 200,000, surpassing the worst of the summer outbreak driven by the Delta variant and approaching last winter's horrific levels when, in January 2021, 3,000 people a day were dying of COVID-19 in the United States. The daily death toll last week averaged 1,408, a rise of 17 percent over the previous week, and this still largely reflects the impact of Delta, not yet the surge in Omicron. Hospitalizations, also a lagging indicator, rose to an average of 71,000.

In New York state alone, the daily case rate has reached 50,000, Democratic Governor Kathy Hochul said on Monday. Hochul appeared at a press conference with her health director Mary T. Bassett, who was masked and distanced because she herself is the victim of a breakthrough case of Omicron, despite being double-vaccinated and boosted.

Bassett warned, "Many people continue to think that children do not become infected with COVID. This is not true. Children become infected with COVID, and some will become hospitalized."

Local and state health officials report dramatic increases in cases and hospitalizations from coast to coast. In Los Angeles County, the most populous in the country, new coronavirus cases rose from 3,052 on Tuesday, December 21; to 6,509 on Wednesday; to 8,633 on Thursday; to 9,988 on Friday; and to 11,930 on Saturday, Christmas Day.

The state of Ohio has the highest rate of COVID-19 hospitalizations, and ICUs are running out of beds, even at the Cleveland Clinic, long a national leader in medical services. Major Ohio hospitals published a joint appeal last week for unvaccinated people to get vaccinated, warning they were being inundated with new, serious infection cases, mostly among the unvaccinated.

These reports conform to the dire projection last week from the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington, which forecast that at its present exponential rate of transmission, the Omicron variant would infect 3 billion people worldwide in the next three months, and 140 million in the United States.

In the face of this looming emergency, the US government is effectively declaring an open door to a disease that will potentially take millions of lives and

have incalculable consequences on the long-term health of millions more.

Last week, the CDC lowered the isolation requirement for health care workers from 10 days to seven days for infected workers who have no symptoms and then test negative and suggested this could be cut to five days, or even less, for health facilities with severe staffing shortages—a description that applies to virtually every hospital, clinic and nursing home.

This step was ostensibly justified by health concerns, to prevent the collapse of the health care system under the impact of the pandemic. But now even looser rules are being proposed for all business operations. There is no health consideration involved in herding factory and office workers back to their jobs while still infected or contagious. Just the opposite: Public health is being sacrificed for profit interests.

Under capitalism, a "functioning society" doesn't mean a society where all people are fed, clothed and housed, their children properly educated and other social needs met. Even American capitalism, the wealthiest in the world, can hardly claim to meet that standard. A "functioning society" means just one thing: A society in which the working class is exploited in the labor process to produce surplus value and profit for the class of capitalists.



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