

White House lies about child hospitalizations amid Omicron surge

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Even as COVID-19 cases surge across the country and child hospitalizations hit record levels, the entire US political establishment is pressing forward with the imminent reopening of schools.

Over 1 million children are set to resume in-person education on January 3 in New York City—the epicenter of the spread of the Omicron variant of COVID-19 in the United States—as part of a nationwide reopening after the holiday break.

The warehousing of children in overcrowded classrooms in antiquated and poorly ventilated buildings is a recipe for mass infection. But the continuation of in-person education is a central aim of the Biden administration, and the White House has made clear that it will not close schools, no matter what the danger posed to children.

To support this action—driven not by public health but by the need for corporations to have children in schools so their parents can return to work—the Biden administration and its top official scientists are openly and flagrantly lying to the public.

“Children are as safe in school as they are anywhere,” Biden falsely stated on December 21 in a claim that is completely without scientific backing or merit.

On Wednesday, the top two official scientists in the United States—Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky and National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) Director Dr. Anthony Fauci—directly lied on national television about the recent surge in child hospitalizations due to the spread of the Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2.

Over the past month, as Omicron has ripped through the US and brought average daily new infections to a staggering 347,074, hospitalizations have also begun to climb, with children increasingly impacted. According to data from the CDC, for the week of December 22-28, a record average of 378 children under 18 years old were hospitalized each day with COVID-19, a 66 percent increase from the week before and higher than the peak of 342 per day reached in September during the Delta surge.

With its high transmissibility, the Omicron variant is clearly having a far worse impact on children than any previous variant. In New York and Washington D.C., pediatric hospitalizations have jumped five-fold this month, while

Florida, Illinois, New Jersey and Ohio are also seeing major surges. These trends are taking place globally, with England reporting a record 564 child hospitalizations from COVID-19 over the past week, as well as major surges in France and other countries.

Well aware of these figures, Dr. Walensky stated on MSNBC Wednesday, “So, we are seeing higher numbers of children in the hospitals. Of course, this is a common time of year for children to be admitted in the hospitals.” She added, “Many of them are actually coming in for another reason. But they happen to be tested when they come in, and they’re found incidentally to have COVID.”

At a press briefing of the White House COVID-19 Response Team on Wednesday, Dr. Fauci echoed these remarks, stating, “Certainly, more children are being infected with the highly transmissible virus, and with that, there naturally will be more hospitalizations in children. It is noteworthy, however, that many children are hospitalized with COVID as opposed to because of COVID.”

This lie from Drs. Fauci and Walensky, which they reiterated in other interviews throughout the day, originated in the political swamp of the far right. The claim that most people are hospitalized *with* COVID-19 and not *because of* COVID-19 has been promoted by far-right commentators and politicians since the beginning of the pandemic and has been used to justify the reckless reopening of schools. In August 2021, as COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations surged among all age groups, Florida’s far-right Governor Ron DeSantis denied the reality that children were being hospitalized for COVID-19.

Dr. Julia Raifman, who has been a leading advocate promoting the use of mask mandates, tweeted an oblique reference to the statements by Fauci and Walensky, writing, “I wish I didn’t need to say this, but [because] fed leaders are now repeating Great Barrington extremist talking points — The death trends follow hospitalization trends. Hundreds of kids died of Delta & I expect the same now.”

Also responding to Fauci and Walensky, data scientist Dr. Jorge Caballero, who has closely tracked COVID-19 data on children throughout the pandemic, tweeted that “these claims are categorically false.” Presenting multiple data sources proving that the vast majority of hospitalized children with

COVID-19 were admitted *because* they were infected with COVID-19, he added, “A decade’s worth of data shows that pediatric trauma is *lowest* during winter months.”

The efforts by Fauci and Walensky to downplay the risks posed to children are the latest expression of the Biden administration’s subordination of public health to corporate interests, which has greatly intensified over the past month amid the unfolding catastrophe of the Omicron surge.

Both official scientists made their comments after seeking to justify the CDC’s modified guidelines on the quarantine and isolation of workers exposed to or infected with COVID-19, which cut these times down to only five days without any scientific justification. These guidelines received enormous criticism from scientists and workers for being obviously tailored to suit the needs of the corporations.

In downplaying the dangers facing children, the Biden administration’s official scientists are providing ideological justification for the drive to fully reopen schools on Monday, when most districts end their winter break. This campaign has the full support of the entire political establishment, the corporate media and the unions, all of which serve the capitalist class. Their primary aim is to ensure that children return to school so that their parents can return to work producing corporate profits.

According to the aggregating site Burbio, at least 969 K-12 public schools have switched to remote learning next week. In total, there are roughly 90,000 K-12 schools across the US, meaning that only 1 percent of all schools are scheduled to be fully remote at the start of the New Year.

Wherever states track data on COVID-19 outbreaks, schools are always the largest drivers of viral transmission. In Michigan, K-12 schools accounted for 60 percent of tracked new outbreaks last week, or 42 out of 71. Due to overcrowding, poor ventilation and filtration, and the total inability to socially distance, schools are prime locations for the spread of COVID-19 and other pathogens.

The policy of sending millions of children back into classrooms in the New Year will vastly intensify the Omicron surge that is already well underway. Over the past two days, the US has set two world records for daily new cases, with 587,564 new cases reported Thursday, an increase of over 100,000 cases above the record set Wednesday. Less than 25 percent of the 74 million Americans under 18 years old are vaccinated, while children under five years old remain ineligible for the vaccines.

According to data from the CDC itself, 1,040 children under 18 years old have now died from COVID-19 in the US. The majority of these deaths, 540, have occurred in the past four months since September 1, 2021, coinciding with the Biden administration’s homicidal school reopening campaign this fall. In the past two weeks, the CDC has logged another 25 pediatric deaths, which threatens to quickly rise in the coming weeks.

Under these extraordinary conditions, which are mirrored

worldwide, educators across the US and globally are increasingly determined to fight to close schools and stop this unfolding catastrophe. There are growing calls on social media to organize wildcat sickout strikes in New York City and other urban centers and for parents to keep their children home to implement de facto school closures.

These workplace actions must be organized and developed at the highest political level, which requires an assimilation of the critical experiences of the past two years. Throughout the pandemic, the most pernicious lies have been told about the impacts of COVID-19 on children and the role that schools play in viral transmission. Classrooms across the US have become crime scenes, where millions of children have been infected, in turn bringing the virus into their homes and communities.

The Global Workers’ Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic, initiated by the *World Socialist Web Site*, will carefully investigate and document the lies and misinformation that have allowed millions to die globally and led to the present catastrophe. The Inquest will connect the history of workers in different industries, as part of the ongoing struggle to unify the international working class to stop the pandemic.

Against the conspiracy of the political establishment, the media, the unions and official scientists, the working class must exert its own independent strength and take the initiative to shut down the schools and factories to stop the spread of COVID-19 and eliminate the virus globally. Temporary lockdowns, with workers provided full income protection, must be combined with the universal deployment of all public health measures, including mass testing, contact tracing, the safe isolation of infected patients, the provision of high quality N95 or better masks to every person and more.

The fight to protect children and all of society from needless infections, deaths and long-term debilitation requires a political struggle against the capitalist system. The ruling class and its representatives have made clear their determination to allow Omicron to rip through schools and workplaces. The working class must respond through collective action, coordinated on a global scale, and aimed at the overturn of all existing institutions responsible for this social crime.



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