Healthy double-vaccinated 23-year-old dies from COVID in Sydney

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The death of James Kondilios, a healthy, double-vaccinated 23-year-old, has shocked large numbers of people. Kondilios contracted the virus at the beginning of the year. Within days his illness was so severe that he was admitted to St Vincent's hospital in Sydney, where he passed away last Tuesday.

The tragic death has refuted the incessant government-media lies—that young people will not be affected, especially if they are vaccinated—used to justify the profit-driven lifting of public health measures.

Ordinary people, along with Kondilios's friends, have justifiably drawn the conclusion that if someone of his age and physical fitness could be struck down by the virus, anybody could be. His impressive achievements at such a young age, moreover, have highlighted the immense potential being lost and the human reality behind the growing daily fatality figures.

The 23-year-old, who completed his schooling at Sydney's Waverley College, represented Australia at the 2015 classic powerlifting world championships in Finland, winning a bronze medal.

After school he completed an advanced science degree at the prestigious Australian National University in Canberra. In 2019, Kondilios was awarded a federal government science innovation award for his work on the genetic variants of eucalyptus that should be planted to address the impact of climate change.

Following his studies, Kondilios worked as a data scientist at the Department of Health in Canberra, where he resided.

In a social media post, Stephen Ma, a friend and colleague of Kondilios, remembered the young man as "'kind, sweet, loving." Ma said he "couldn't ask for a better friend…Likewise bro, the years I spent with you will always be a great part of my life, you will always be on my mind to delight me, encourage me and guide me."

Lisa Divissi, a senior producer at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's Radio National posted on Twitter: "James is my sister's partner. If you had the chance to meet him, you'll know how wonderful and irreplaceable he is. We are all devastated and miss him so much."

A close friend of Kondilios, Julia Adamcewicz, said his passing was a warning that "even the strongest and wisest can be taken from this world before their time... Yesterday was a reminder that this battle with Covid we have all been a part of for the last few years is not something to be taken lightly as even the healthiest people can be taken far too young."

It is not known whether Kondilios was infected with the Omicron or Delta strains. When governments lifted the handful of remaining safety measures last month and declared that the crucial issue was for mass gatherings and travel to resume over the holiday season, Delta was still circulating and Omicron had been allowed to enter the country.

In New South Wales (NSW) and other states, governments stopped mass genomic sequencing within weeks of the Omicron surge beginning mid-last month. This means that no one knows how widely Delta is spreading, even if the vast majority of new infections involve Omicron.

As in other countries, moreover, the combined circulation of the two strains poses the acute risk of new variants emerging, including the possibility of one that combines the lethality of Delta and the transmissibility of Omicron, which epidemiologists have warned would be a total catastrophe.

The New Year has begun with other horror stories.

Last week, 13-month-old Dakota Conry suddenly died in her sleep, after having tested positive for

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COVID. The baby and her family live in Adelaide, where COVID had been eliminated before the South Australian state government opened the borders last month, deliberately allowing the virus to enter its jurisdiction.

In announcing the death, South Australian Premier Steven Marshall was at pains to stress that it was not known whether the infant had died “of” or “with” COVID—the catch all and meaningless word play used by governments to minimise hospitalisations and fatalities.

The baby, however, did not reportedly have any other medical conditions and died at home.

Last Friday, Sebastian Moroney, a three-year-old boy with a rare genetic disease called Niemann-Pick became the youngest victim of the virus in NSW, passing away after contracting COVID-19 in December.

The claims of governments, that with Omicron and high rates of vaccination there would be a “decoupling” of severe illness and fatalities from infection numbers, are being refuted, not only in the scientific warnings of epidemiologists, but also in the sharpest increase in deaths since the pandemic began.

At the end of November, total deaths were 2,006. Since 1 December, 381 people have lost their lives. This means that deaths in the past month and 10 days alone account for 16 percent of total fatalities registered throughout the entire pandemic. The number will grow, with NSW recording 18 deaths today, a record exceeding the worst days of last year’s Delta outbreak.

Hospitalisations are also soaring. In NSW, current admissions reached 2,030 today, the first time the state has exceeded the 2,000-mark. A month ago, the figure was 150, and at the beginning of the year, less than a thousand. The same trend is evident in every other state.

Already, the hospital system is in an unprecedented crisis. This is epitomised by the fact that COVID-infected nurses are being forced to continue working in some NSW hospitals. COVID and non-COVID wards are now being combined, ending any infection controls on the premise that all patients and staff will be exposed to the virus anyway.

The massive wave of infections continues. There have been more cases in the ten days of this year than the previous two years combined.

Young people are being hit hard. In NSW, for instance, there have been 292,196 confirmed infections since December 1. Of those, 57,246, or 20 percent of the total have been among children and teenagers aged 0-19, the highest of any age bracket. The second highest share is among 20 to 24 year-olds, with 48,847 cases, or 17 percent. Even these figures are a vast underestimation given the breakdown of the testing regime.

Each day, thousands of young people are being infected with the deadly virus. Not only do they risk immediate illness and death. They are also imperilled with the paralysing consequences of “Long-COVID,”—a series of potentially permanent and debilitating conditions associated with the virus. As epidemiologists have warned, every day of mass infections could be described as a mass disabling event.

The fact that governments are pressing ahead with the “live with the virus” program under these conditions demonstrates that workers must take matters into their own hands. This means a struggle for the elimination of the virus and for urgent safety measures, including the closure of non-essential businesses.

Everything must be done to prevent the forced return to school classrooms being prepared by governments and the complicit teacher unions for the end of this month or there will be many more tragedies. The same is the case at universities, where managements are preparing a full resumption of on-campus learning.

Read the Socialist Equality Party’s open letter to workers in Australia and take up its call to “Join the global fight to end the pandemic and save lives in 2022!”

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