

More than half a million children infected with COVID-19 in the US last week, shattering previous records

Emma Arceneaux
11 January 2022

Monday's report from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) for the week ending January 6 recorded a staggering 580,247 pediatric COVID-19 cases, up 74 percent from the previous week's record 325,000 cases. There were also a record 1,636 pediatric hospitalizations and 14 additional deaths.

Each region of the country has skyrocketing child cases that have blown past previous records. The Northeast, with 155,000 cases last week, has nearly overtaken the South for the region with the highest number of weekly child infections. The Midwest and West Coast are not far behind.

Across the US, pediatric hospitals are rapidly filling, even before the full effects of Omicron's spread are felt. Dr. Danielle Zerr, pediatric infectious diseases expert at Seattle Children's Hospital, told the *New York Times* that child hospitalizations are "blowing away our previous Delta wave at the end of the summer, early fall, which had been our highest prior to that."

In Louisiana, Dr. Catherine O'Neal of Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center in Baton Rouge, observed to WWNO that "we're already seeing our max number of kids who have ever been admitted to the children's hospital during one surge, and we're not done with this surge yet. Cases continue to mount. We could have our sickest pediatric population of the pandemic so far, and that is not mild."

The 14 deaths were spread across each region of the country. The corporate media continues its virtual cover-up of these children's deaths, with only one California child's death being reported by local or national news in recent weeks. As of January 10, the CDC has documented 1,084 pediatric deaths, with a staggering 44 deaths recorded by their tally in just the past 10 days.

Educators continue to needlessly die from the virus as well. An unofficial tracker on Twitter has documented at least 11 educators' deaths in the first 10 days of 2022.

These include high school drama teacher Jeannie ("J") Hutter of Independence, Missouri, who, despite being triple vaccinated, died on January 5 at the age of 57. Her sister and co-teacher Tommie told local news that J had a rare autoimmune disorder that causes inflammation of the blood vessels.

Notably, because J had an underlying health condition, her death would be deemed "encouraging news" according to CDC Director Rochelle Walensky.

Since the start of the semester, there have been thousands of school closures due to the widespread infection of staff and students. Burbio, which tracks K-12 closures, recorded 5,409 school disruptions the week of January 2 and 1,338 active closures on January 10. These have occurred across the country, from Oregon to Arkansas, Vermont, Pennsylvania, Minnesota and New Hampshire.

Jefferson County Public Schools in Kentucky, the largest school district in the state with more than 100,000 students, canceled school Monday and announced that the district would switch to remote learning Tuesday through Friday following 1,660 infections last week, the highest number to date. The Covington Independent School District in Northern Kentucky is also returning to remote learning for its 3,800 students.

Rochelle, a teacher from a district north of Detroit, where there were 918 school cases last week, told the WSWS: "A lot of the information is being brushed under the rug. They want to tell us that Omicron has milder symptoms, though they don't have all the information yet. At the same time they hide what they do know. The actual recorded hospitalization in South Africa of young kids under the age of five is very high.

"Recently I saw a chart about the [Michigan] Thumb area. We are experiencing a 33 percent test positivity rate. Because of the rising numbers, mask mandates have been reestablished in our schools. Our county health director eliminated her quarantine mandate early in the school year after legislation from Lansing threatened to cut funding where there were quarantine orders or mask mandates.

"While you can blame the Republicans and Trump for what they did, it is actually worse now. When Biden got elected, instead of a change, the same policy of normalizing death has continued."

The unprecedented spread of the disease has triggered widespread opposition among educators, parents and students to the reopening of schools in-person.

At the forefront of the opposition are the 20,000 Chicago

public school teachers who voted last week not to return to in-person classes due to the pandemic. Late Monday night, the Chicago Teachers Union announced an agreement with the Democratic Party administration of Lori Lightfoot to force teachers back to work. Teachers will be voting on the agreement today, and there is enormous opposition on social media.

WBEZ reported Monday that CTU President Jesse Sharkey admitted that “the union has compromised on some of the biggest issues, including widespread testing and on remote learning.”

Student-organized protests and walkouts are also increasing, reflecting the growing impact that the pandemic and the murderous policies of the federal and local governments are having on the consciousness of young people.

In New York City, where hospitalizations have tripled since Christmas, students at several high schools are planning to walk out on Tuesday.

An educator in Brooklyn told the WSWS that students are given very little information when their classmates test positive. She saw her students carrying take-home rapid tests and asked them if they understood what the boxes were for. “They just shrugged,” she said. “I told them this means you have been exposed to COVID and they have to test negative before they can return to school. I explained to them that they should give the boxes to their parents and tell them you have been exposed. They said ‘Really? Someone in our class had COVID?’ They had no idea.”

Blowing apart the cynical lies of the Democrats, Republicans, unions and the media that schools must remain open in-person for the mental health of students and to minimize learning loss are the actual reports from teachers and students on what in-person “learning” currently looks like.

A New York City high school student recently posted on Reddit a description of the chaotic conditions in schools, with record numbers of teachers, staff and students out sick. Due to the absences, entire classes are herded into an auditorium for study hall: “We literally learn nothing. I spent about 3 hours sitting around today doing nothing.” The classes that actually take place are “quiet and empty. Students are staying home because of risk of COVID.”

The post has received over a thousand comments, with students and teachers from across the country sharing similar stories.

Referencing a recent bill signed into law by Democratic Governor of Michigan Gretchen Whitmer, one teacher responded, “What’s happening here is similar to what’s happening in another place where they are ‘deputizing’ bus drivers and janitors to ‘teach’ students. This is just showing that the people in charge are not actually interested in actually *educating* the children, but only interested in checking boxes, warehousing, and going through the motions purely for appearances.”

A teacher in the Dallas-Fort Worth area of Texas reported to the WSWS that he has had multiple classes since the start of the semester in which “I didn’t have a single student present. The district is scrambling for substitutes too. Parents are substituting for AP classes, computer science and high-level classes, which they know nothing about. Last year I would have had a virtual curriculum prepared, but this year we weren’t allowed to work on a virtual curriculum over the summer, so that there would be no fall-back to virtual.”

Citing the dangerous spread of COVID in schools, students in Massachusetts have also circulated a petition, which has over 4,500 signatures, to demand a remote learning option.

In Oakland, California, following a wildcat sickout by teachers on Friday against dangerous conditions, over 600 students have signed a petition demanding the district switch to remote learning until schools are safe. The students threaten to strike beginning on the 18th if their demands for increased protections are not met.

At Hickman High School in Columbia, Missouri, over 120 students staged a walkout Monday to protest the district dropping its mask mandate. Their petition to the school board to reconsider the decision received over 2,500 signatures.

Students at Langara College in British Columbia, Canada, have also circulated a petition demanding remote instruction, noting that, “As a group, we unequivocally agree that our mental and physical health would suffer more in-person with the risks of COVID-19 compared to learning at home, virtually.”

The immediate closure of all in-person schooling is a life-or-death question for the working class and youth in the US and internationally. Every effort must be made to support and expand the emerging initiative of educators and students to demand remote instruction until the pandemic is brought under control.

This requires the formation of rank-and-file safety committees, independent of the corporatist trade unions, including the teachers’ unions, which have collaborated in the ruling class policy of reopening schools.

The WSWS urges educators to contact us today to discuss building a rank-and-file committee in your school to carry forward the fight to end the pandemic.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact