

Omicron surge is pushing hospitals to the brink across the US

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As the present surge in the coronavirus is shattering all previous pandemic case and hospitalization highs across the country, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) forecast on Wednesday that as many as 62,000 people will die from COVID-19 in the US over the next four weeks.

The CDC also reported on Tuesday that, as of January 8, the Omicron variant accounts for 98.3 percent of all new COVID-19 infections. In some regions of the country, such as the Deep South, Florida and the New York-New Jersey area, Omicron is estimated at more than 99 percent of cases.

Despite the exponential rise in cases and the catastrophic strain being placed upon the US health care infrastructure, the corporate media and political establishment are continuing to push the unscientific claim that Omicron is a “milder” variant of the virus.

However, as the following reports from states across the US show, the false assertions about Omicron are being used by the capitalist elite to block any measures to stop the spread of the virus and keep workers on the job and students in the schools regardless of how many people die from the pandemic.

Florida

On Tuesday, there were 71,742 new cases, and Florida set a new 7-day average record of 65,551 cases of COVID-19. There were 11,378 people hospitalized in the state, according to the US Department of Health and Human Services. The number of hospitalizations is up 291.9 percent over the past two weeks.

Justin Senior, CEO of the Safety Net Hospital Alliance of Florida, told ABC25 in the Palm Beach area that hospitals in the state were being hit by “a tidal wave” and that the biggest issue is that Omicron is so infectious that nurses and doctors are being forced to miss work. Senior said that the state’s hospitals are facing “intense workloads” while “they’re short-staffed,” and “there’s a lot of difficulty there and a lot of stress.”

While the media and politicians in the Democratic and Republican parties are attempting to blame the Omicron surge on the unvaccinated, Jackson Memorial Hospital in the Miami area reported 514 COVID-positive patients with 117, or 23 percent of them, vaccinated. The fact that Omicron is infecting the vaccinated is also proof that the variant is not mild.

On Tuesday, Miami-Dade County had the highest per capita rate of daily COVID-19 cases of any densely populated county

in the country with a 7-day average of 4,065 cases per 100,000 population. Broward County’s rate was 2,573, and Palm Beach County’s was 1,947. Overall, Florida ranks the fifth highest among states for average daily per capita cases.

After he was criticized for being silent and unavailable over the past two weeks, Florida Republican Governor Ron DeSantis gave a press conference on Wednesday and claimed that hospital staff shortages were the result of “healthy” employees being sent home after they were exposed to the virus. He also claimed of the surge that “you’ll see a downturn very soon” in areas that were hit first by Omicron.

Michigan

Michigan health officials reported on Tuesday that the pandemic is pushing the entire health care infrastructure to the point of collapse. Dr. Natasha Bagdasarian, the chief medical executive for the state, told *Crain’s Detroit Business* that Michigan is on the path of the most pessimistic of possible modeling outcomes from the Omicron surge.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) is projecting 8,000 hospitalizations per week by the end of January, and deaths could reach as many as 1,800 per week. As dire as these projections are, she added, “These models are not taking into account that our health systems are already under strain. Adding more cases right now is going to lead to more strain and worse outcomes.”

Dr. Bagdasarian shot down claims that Omicron will bring “herd immunity” and end the pandemic. She said the percentage of unvaccinated people remains too high and the virus remains too dangerous to allow mass spreading. “It’s not something magical that happens overnight,” she said.

Michigan reported a new record number of 1,301 weekly confirmed cases of COVID-19 per 100,000 residents and a test positivity rate of 33.2 percent. Another statistic that exposes the claims of the mildness of Omicron is the fact that it is infecting young people ages 20 to 29 years and 30 to 39 years in greater numbers than any other age groups.

Child hospitalizations also reached a record in Michigan on Tuesday at 107, which is 66 percent higher than the week of December 20. The MDHHS reported that there were 22 new pediatric hospital admissions every day during the past week.

Lauren Yagiela, a doctor at Children’s Hospital of Michigan,

said that the hospital is seeing a rise in COVID-19 pneumonia, myocarditis and multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C). Yagiela told *Crain's* that even though the majority of children have recovered, "these children can be in the hospital for up to one or two months. Pediatric ICU admission can have a lasting impact on their emotional and physical health."

There is growing opposition within the working class to the policies of the Michigan state government. An organization called the Michigan Parent Alliance for Safe Schools issued a statement on Tuesday which said, "[T]he state is on fire, because many of those in power have not used that power to keep us from getting to this point." The group said that children, educators and health care workers "are suffering needlessly due to a dereliction of duty" and demanded that a mask mandate be adopted in all of the state's K-12 schools.

Arizona

Total cases of COVID-19 in Arizona surpassed 1.5 million on Tuesday, and the number of deaths approached 25,000. For the sixth consecutive day, the Arizona Department of Health Services reported more than 10,000 new cases. The number of hospitalizations hit 5,082, and the number of COVID-19 ICU patients hit 1,183 on Tuesday, both are pandemic highs in the state. The death toll hit 213.

Dr. Marjorie Bessel, chief clinical officer at the Arizona's largest health care network, Banner Health, told a press conference in Phoenix on Tuesday that Omicron is not only filling up Arizona hospitals with COVID-19 patients. She said, "[w]hen the surge occurs in the community, our own employees also get ill. So, we are seeing an increase now of our team members who are becoming ill."

Dr. Bessel reported that the hospital chain had to close some of its urgent care locations due to staffing shortages. She also said that nearly a third of in-patient beds at Banner hospitals are occupied by COVID-19 or suspected COVID-19 patients, with roughly 90 percent of those being unvaccinated.

Colorado

Health officials in Colorado reactivated crisis standards of care for emergency medical services on January 7 in response to the surge in COVID-19 cases across the state. Dr. Eric France, chief medical officer of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), made the decision in response to EMS staff becoming ill with coronavirus.

The guidance is a form of triage, permitting EMS personnel to stop life-saving measures in patients with out-of-hospital cardiac arrest, limiting the cases taken to the hospital. The announcement from the CDPHE was made in the same week that hospitals in the Denver area warned of "razor thin" capacity that would get worse if more frontline workers continue to get sick with COVID-19.

Kathy Howell, the chief nursing officer for University of Colorado Hospital, told ABC7 Denver, "We've seen a sharp uptick in the last couple of days, and if we stay at this

trajectory, we also will have a record number of in-patients."

Howell reported that 98 percent of the hospital system's ICU beds are full, and their acute care beds are well over capacity. She also said she was concerned for what Omicron will do to an already exhausted workforce who are not only tired but who are now getting sick from COVID-19 due to the variant's effectiveness at by-passing vaccination.

Texas

On Wednesday, the Texas Department of State Health Services reported 61,113 confirmed new cases of COVID-19 and 14,704 probable cases for a total of 75,817, the highest daily state total since the pandemic began. Test positivity rates reached 35.6 percent in Texas on Tuesday.

James Versalovic, pathologist-in-chief at Texas Children's Hospital in Houston, where patients are tested for COVID-19 upon admission regardless of whether they are showing symptoms, told the *Texas Tribune* that the percentage of tests coming back positive reached an all-time high for the pandemic and nearly all of them are the Omicron variant. Meanwhile, Cook Children's Medical Center in Fort Worth reported a record 69 pediatric coronavirus patients in a single day.

School districts in the Dallas-Fort Worth area are canceling classes due to the surge in cases. In Mansfield, six elementary schools are closed Thursday through the MLK holiday where district officials are reporting absences and a shortage of substitute teachers due to the Omicron spike. In rural Boyd and Maypearl independent school districts classes were canceled after a surge in new cases.



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