

Australian governments claim Omicron peaking as hospitalisations and deaths mount

Martin Scott
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In recent days, numerous figures in the Australian political establishment have declared that the current surge of the Omicron variant will peak around the end of the month. Like their assertions that Omicron is “mild,” these claims are being refuted by unprecedented infections, hospitalisations and deaths.

Australia’s Chief Medical Officer Paul Kelly claimed yesterday that infections in New South Wales (NSW) “are close to peaking if not already.” NSW Health Deputy Secretary Susan Pearce said the authority was “increasingly confident” that case numbers would begin to decline in the state next week.

Queensland Chief Health Officer John Gerrard also claimed that cases in that state would peak soon, stating: “Our modelling has suggested that Queensland in general is two weeks behind NSW.”

There is no scientific basis for these claims. They are instead part of the profit-driven campaign to railroad workers back into unsafe workplaces, and teachers and students back into schools, further escalating the crisis.

A warning of what this murderous campaign looks like has been provided by experiences at the Teys meatworks in South Australia. COVID-19 positive workers were instructed to attend work last Monday, with the blessing of the state health department, on the grounds that they were “essential” and rigorous safety measures would be in place.

Within days, 140 of the factory’s 400 workers had contracted the virus and the site was closed on Thursday for supposed “deep cleaning.” But it is set to open again on Monday with COVID-19 positive workers still forced to work.

Silent on the issue throughout the week, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), clearly responding to widespread outrage, has now issued mealy-mouthed criticisms of the “bad and dangerous precedent.” The union, however, will do nothing.

The reality is, the ACTU is working together with the federal government to force close contacts back to work, the logical extension of which is exactly the situation that has taken place at Teys.

Certainly any reduction in infection numbers will not be the result of an intervention by any Australian government or

health authority.

Far from acting to suppress the rising infection numbers, state, territory and federal governments, Labor and Liberal-National alike, have repealed public health measures on an almost daily basis.

The definition of “close contacts” has been altered to exclude workplace transmissions, and even household contacts are being forced back to work in an increasing number of industries.

Less than a quarter of the adult population have received booster shots, while the vaccine rollout to children aged 5 to 11 began only on Monday.

NSW Chief Health Officer Kerry Chant said yesterday that, according to modelling, the state “may see around 50 percent of the population impacted in this first wave of Omicron.” According to the official figure of around 658,000 cases in NSW, which has a population of more than 8 million, since the start of December, this would suggest the state is far from reaching a peak.

The complete breakdown of the country’s testing and contact tracing infrastructure means the real number of cases is unknown.

With polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing now limited to household close contacts and people with symptoms, and rapid antigen tests (RATs) still in short supply, daily case numbers are almost meaningless.

Self-reported positive RAT results are now included in official figures in most states, however, it is entirely unclear how much duplication there is between RAT and PCR tests, and how many RAT tests are going unreported. Because there is no requirement to report negative RAT results, it is impossible to gauge what percentage of people are testing positive. Australia-wide almost 28 percent of PCR tests this week were positive.

What is clear is that hospitalisations, intensive care unit (ICU) admissions and deaths are rising around the country.

Today, more than 4,600 people across Australia are hospitalised for COVID-19, an increase of almost 50 percent in the past week. ICU numbers have swelled by almost one third to 385, and 112 patients are on ventilators.

Fifty-three Australians died from COVID-19, bringing the

total for the past seven days to 286.

Yesterday, NSW reported 29 COVID-19 deaths, the state's highest daily toll during the pandemic, the fifth time in six days that grim record was broken. At the same press conference in which this figure was reported, Premier Dominic Perrottet proudly proclaimed the state's ICU and hospitalisation rates to be "better than the best-case scenario we released last week."

In Victoria, hospitals are so overwhelmed that the state has announced plans to house COVID-19 patients in hotels from next week.

Australian Medical Association President Omar Khorshid spoke out against this plan, stating: "If they still require care, they should be in a health facility and these hotels are not health facilities."

Contrary to the pronouncements from state and federal leaders and health authorities that health systems are "coping" with the surge of COVID-19, growing numbers of health workers are taking to social media to expose the immense pressure they are coming under.

An anonymous Victorian "COVID doctor" wrote on Reddit yesterday: "Today I quit, I can't do it anymore, you can only take so much for so long."

The doctor continued: "I'm having to watch people with heart attacks, strokes, surgical needs, cancers, motor vehicle accidents, burns, etc, all wait in accident and emergency for a bed. I've started to see the unnecessary deaths pile up, started to see people have bad outcomes that didn't need to be as bad if they had gotten onto the wards quicker. Many are dying of COVID, many are the ones who are actually doing the correct things."

The doctor criticised the Andrews Labor government for: "Lowering isolation requirements, reopening venues, to keep the workforce going, despite all scientific evidence contradicting their actions. Workers are going down all over, but they're worried about the economy and not the people."

Another Reddit post, from a Sydney doctor, described the terrible risk posed to immune-compromised people, such as the cancer patients she treats, by the reckless "let it rip" policies of Australian governments.

She wrote: "Most of [my patients] have done the right thing. Gotten vaccinated. Stayed home. Wore a mask at every appointment. Despite everything they try they are getting COVID-19. Maybe the daughter that picks up groceries for them has it. Maybe the nurse who comes to the house to give them antibiotics. It's everywhere and it's unavoidable."

She continued: "None of the decisions being made right now are science-based, they are political. It's because someone decided we are 'all going to get COVID-19 anyway,' so why not all at once?"

The doctor explained that, with hospitals at "breaking point," it was a struggle to "organise sotrovimab for my patients," a crucial monoclonal antibody treatment for COVID. She wrote: "[C]annot find a bed or a chair or a nurse to give the drug. I

find doctors with haunted looks who have not taken their mask off for a sip of water in 12 hours."

The doctor reported that her husband, who works in a Sydney emergency department, had "seen at least three people die this week who should not have died." These deaths were not from COVID-19, but were caused by delays in receiving treatment because the health system is overwhelmed.

"One was a man with diarrhoea," she explained. "The family called 3 times for an ambulance and were told each time they could not spare an ambulance to get to them. They didn't say why but we all know why. It's the same reason there are no apples on the shelves."

According to data released yesterday by the Australian Department of Health, there are currently 1,107 COVID-19 outbreaks in aged care facilities around the country. More than 3,200 residents and at least 3,806 staff are infected, and there have been 37 COVID-19 deaths in aged care in the first two weeks of 2022.

Paul Sadler, CEO of Aged and Community Services Australia, told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation up to 50 percent of workers in the sector were currently infected with COVID-19 or in isolation. Sadler also reported critical shortages of rapid antigen tests and personal protective equipment.

Up until Tuesday, just 1,700 of the 2,700 federally funded aged care facilities in Australia had been attended by the private contractors engaged to administer booster shots. Fewer than 200 facilities have been vaccinated since December 25.

The working class must reject the latest propaganda claims by Australia's Labor and Liberal-National governments that COVID-19 will somehow go away of its own accord, as their own policies ensure ever greater infections. The unions have demonstrated that they are entirely on board with the campaign to force workers exposed to the virus back to work.

This means workers must take matters into their own hands and form independent rank-and-file safety committees in every workplace to ensure safe working conditions for all. This includes demanding the immediate closure of facilities, with full compensation for workers, when COVID-19 outbreaks occur, and fighting for the elimination of the virus through lockdown and other public health measures.



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