

Australian COVID-19 deaths continue to climb as governments claim Omicron is about to “peak”

Martin Scott
17 January 2022

As Australia's state and federal governments continue to repeat the baseless assertion that COVID-19 infections will soon “peak,” New South Wales (NSW) Chief Health Officer Kerry Chant today warned that deaths are expected to climb in the coming days.

Federal Health Minister Greg Hunt claimed yesterday there were “signs that NSW in particular and the ACT may be peaking.” NSW Premier Dominic Perrottet described yesterday's official figures—34,399 new infections, 2,650 people current hospital admissions and 20 deaths—as “incredibly encouraging and pleasing.”

The reality is, the woeful state of COVID-19 testing in Australia, along with the redefinition of “close contacts” to include only household transmission, render any scientific assessment of infection numbers impossible.

The claim that the current wave of COVID-19 has “peaked”, or soon will, is instead part of a barrage of propaganda aimed at forcing people back to work and school.

Australia's trade unions are actively participating in this drive. Having covered up the rampant infection throughout workplaces, these thoroughly corporatised bureaucracies have, in recent days, been forced to react to mounting anger among workers and issue mealy-mouthed demands for N95 masks and rapid antigen tests.

These measures would do little to protect the health and lives of workers and are instead aimed at allowing business to continue operating, even as illness decimates the workforce. The primary concern of the unions, together with the governments, is to keep a lid on mounting opposition to the dangerous pandemic policies.

More than 73,500 new COVID-19 infections were reported across Australia today, a vast underestimate of the real figure. The number of people hospitalised for COVID-19 passed 5,000 nationally for the first time in the pandemic, while 410 people are in intensive care, 121 of them on ventilators. Thirty-one COVID-19 deaths were

reported today, including seven in Queensland, six in Victoria and one in the Australian Capital Territory.

Today, NSW reported 17 deaths from COVID-19, of people aged between 60 and 100. Fourteen of the victims were fully vaccinated, while one had received only one dose and two were unvaccinated.

In the past week, 140 people have died from COVID in NSW. Ninety-eight were fully vaccinated, two had received only one dose and 40 were unvaccinated. Twenty-five of those who died were aged under 70.

While other states do not regularly report this information, the Victorian Labor government's acting Health Minister James Merlino stated on Friday that around 40 percent of people who had died of COVID-19 in the state “recently” were fully vaccinated.

Both states have reported that around half of COVID-19 intensive care unit (ICU) admissions are fully vaccinated patients.

These figures make clear that, while vaccination against COVID-19 is critical, inoculation alone cannot stop the deadly virus. The “let it rip” policies of almost every Australian state, territory or federal government, Labor and Liberal-National alike, under which virtually all public health measures were abandoned based on arbitrary vaccination targets, have caused infections to surge out of control and have already resulted in hundreds of preventable deaths.

Western Australia, the only state or territory that has not yet acceded to the demands of big business and thrown open its borders, stands as a clear refutation of the claims, advanced by every other government, that the wave of infection was inevitable. Since December 1, the state has recorded just 176 cases. There has not been a death in Western Australia from COVID-19 since May 2020. Its Labor government, however, is preparing to open the borders in line with the Labor Party's full support for the “live with the virus” program.

Australia's deadliest seven-day period since the start of the pandemic—301 COVID-19 deaths were recorded in the country in the week ending yesterday—has done nothing to diminish the insistence from the political establishment that the population must continue to “ride the wave.”

Merlino declared, “We are one of the most vaccinated jurisdictions in the world, and that means we can stay open.”

Speaking at a press conference yesterday, Chant matter-of-factly stated: “As we go through 2022, we will see and report people who have died, particularly people who are older and particularly people with underlying health conditions.”

Perpetuating the unscientific claim that Omicron is “mild,” Chant claimed: “People with underlying health conditions only need to have a very mild illness to sometimes have them decompensate. They’re very vulnerable because they’re just on that edge.”

In other words, Chant and the NSW political establishment have decided that the preventable deaths of hundreds of people is acceptable, simply because they are older or have underlying health conditions.

Chant also revealed last week that 67 percent of NSW’s ICU patients had Omicron, making clear that the variant is far from “mild.” The corollary is that the remaining one third are the Delta variant, which is clearly still circulating and has not been eliminated by the new variant as was suggested would happen when governments allowed Omicron to run rampant.

The Murdoch press has enthusiastically taken up the campaign to falsely characterise COVID-19 as a “pandemic of the unvaccinated.” Zeroing in on a single small regional hospital in Lismore, Northern NSW, an article published in yesterday’s *Sunday Telegraph* reported that all six of the hospital’s ICU patients were unvaccinated.

The article went on to state that only 106 of the 1,248 COVID-19 patients admitted to ICU in NSW between June and December last year were fully vaccinated. No mention was made of the fact that, for much of that period, vaccines were not available to the majority of Australians. At the beginning of June 2021, just 2.3 percent of the country’s population had received two doses of the vaccine. Except in certain “hotspot” areas, those aged 16-39 were not eligible to receive their first dose until the beginning of September.

While this was put forward to suggest that vaccination is a panacea and those who suffer severe symptoms have only themselves to blame, it stands as an indictment of Australia’s shambolic vaccine rollout.

The article estimated that the state had spent \$4.9 million per day on ICU care for unvaccinated patients compared to \$463,000 per day for vaccinated patients. The clear insinuation is that the small minority of Australian adults

who are not vaccinated are a burden on society and should be refused the basic human right of free medical care.

The fact that the vast majority of Australian adults are fully vaccinated (two doses) and are now desperately seeking out booster shots for themselves, and vaccines for their 5-11 year-old children, is a reflection of just how seriously the masses of working people take the pandemic.

On November 27, Chief Medical Officer Paul Kelly said that mass infection with the supposedly “mild” Omicron variant would be his “number one Christmas present.”

NSW Liberal-National Health Minister Brad Hazzard stated in December “pretty well everybody” will get Omicron, while John Gerrard, chief health officer for the Queensland Labor government, said earlier this month, “all of us are going to be exposed.”

Australia’s Labor and Liberal-National governments have not merely accepted and promoted this fatalistic position, they are actively ensuring that it takes place. As cases have surged, public health measures have been discarded, borders opened and testing sharply reduced. In line with the demands of big business, governments have used the supply chain crisis created by widespread infection as justification to force possibly infected workers back on the job.

The claims that the current surge has peaked, or will soon peak, are just the latest stage in this propaganda campaign aimed at clearing the way for new policies that will lead to an even greater surge.

Despite the conscious efforts of governments, health authorities and the corporate media to downplay the severity of COVID-19, there is growing opposition to criminal “let it rip” policies and the forced return to work and school.

In one example, a recent survey of 3,043 families by advocacy group The Parenthood found that just one-fifth of respondents believed it was safe for school to return in Term 1, scheduled for the end of this month and the beginning of next.

This growing anger and concern must find conscious political expression. Teachers, parents and students must join with workers across all industries in opposing the reckless promotion of mass infection with a virus that is anything but “mild.”

The working class must now take their lives into their own hands, and fight for a socialist perspective, in which the health and lives of the mass of the population are prioritised over the profit interests of a wealthy few.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact