

America's COVID-19 nightmare

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As the Omicron variant of COVID-19 spreads throughout the United States, it is leading to a surge in cases, deaths and hospitalizations.

Today, the official death toll in the United States from the pandemic will hit 875,000, and a staggering 45,000 have died in the past month alone. The true death toll, according to “excess death” statistics from *The Economist*, stands at over 1 million.

Every day, an average of 2,000 Americans are dying from this preventable disease, with the daily death toll spiking as high as 2,700 on some days. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) projects the death toll will grow to an average of 3,000 per day in the coming weeks as hospitals are increasingly overwhelmed by the flood of patients.

The Omicron wave has been far more dangerous to children than any previous surge of the pandemic. In the past six days alone, 42 children have died from COVID-19, a rate of 7 per day. This is roughly double the rate that children died during the peak of the Delta surge last fall, which killed over 500 children in the US. In total, 1,127 US children have now succumbed to the virus, according to CDC figures. Countless others, whose cases are classified as “mild,” suffer from the impact of Long COVID.

Since the first US case of the Omicron variant was detected in early December, infant COVID-19 hospitalizations have surged four-fold, according to CDC figures referenced by *The Economist*. In New York, the worst hit state, child hospitalizations increased seven-fold from the week of December 5-11 to the week of January 2-8.

Overall, the number of people hospitalized with COVID-19 nationwide has reached 154,208, nearly 25,000 higher than any previous surge.

The massive surge in cases, hospitalizations and deaths is the outcome of the Biden administration's decision to abandon all measures to stop the spread of

the disease. Last month, the government shortened isolation requirements for infected workers to five days, forcing contagious workers back on the job to infect others.

In hospitals, some of which are urging infected workers to work without any isolation period at all, in-hospital COVID-19 transmission has surged four-fold.

On every social media platform, on-the-ground reports of horrific experiences and conditions facing health care workers, educators and workers across industries are documented daily.

Teachers and educators, forced back into classrooms with the claim that schools and higher education facilities are safe, are seeing their students fall ill and spread COVID-19 to their family members. One educator in New Jersey tweeted, “In the last two weeks, I’ve had two students get covid in school, bring it home, and now their caregivers (mom and grandma) are dead.”

Those hospitalized are being treated by a workforce stretched to the limit. In a narrative that went viral on Twitter, emergency medicine doctor Regina Royan posted a selfie of herself, nearly 9 months pregnant, in a hospital bathroom wearing an elastomeric mask with the caption, “last shift treating an ER full of covid at 39 1/2 weeks!”

Italian doctor Irine Tosetti commented, “terrible to see what the USA does to their workers.”

But even so, the country's hospital system cannot keep up. The *Boston Globe* wrote, in an article posted last week, “The state's largest health care system, Mass General Brigham, starting Monday, will be slashing thousands of surgeries it performs each week as it strains to stay ahead of the tsunami of patients pouring into its hospitals.”

Across the country, the medical system is breaking down. “Literally have docs posting on medical Facebook groups desperately looking for hospitals to

transfer their critically ill patients to and they're coming up empty," wrote physician Jeremy Faust on Twitter.

But as hospitals are overwhelmed in the crush of cases, as vital services are delayed, as doctors face post-traumatic stress disorder for dealing with a surge of death, another narrative dominates the national media: The crisis is over; Omicron is "mild;" and mass infection should simply be accepted.

"Is Omicron Peaking?" asks *New York Times* columnist David Leonhardt, repeating a false claim he has made throughout the pandemic

Worse, some news outlets are actively promoting mass infection. "For some who recently contracted Covid, an unexpected emotion: Relief," writes NBC News. NBC's story, overwhelmingly condemned by doctors and public health experts, stated, "Some with recent Covid diagnoses are finding that contracting the illness they worked so hard to dodge for so long has brought them an unexpected reprieve from anxiety—instead of compounding it further."

"Slow the Spread? Speeding It May Be Safer," an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* declared.

More and more, reporting of the actual state of the pandemic is relegated to the fourth or fifth slot in the evening news. Inevitably, the "good news" is highlighted amidst the catastrophe. Yesterday, it was the assertion that cases are peaking in some cities due to the sheer mass of infections. Meanwhile, the virus is inundating broad sections of the country, including rural areas.

As thousands die each day, the effort is being made to condition the public to simply accept mass infection and death as inevitable. The stories of doctors, educators and health care workers are being ignored.

But the total indifference to human life on the part of the ruling class is breeding a groundswell of opposition among workers and young people. Last week, thousands of students in dozens of high schools in Chicago staged walkouts in solidarity with their teachers, who, despite a vote to continue remote instruction, were forced back into classrooms by the Chicago Teachers Union.

Throughout the country, workers at pharmacies, grocery stores, railways and other workplaces are entering into struggle to demand decent wages and safe working conditions.

There is growing outrage at the Biden administration, which, after pledging to "follow the science," has entirely embraced the Trump administration's "let it rip" policies of mass infection.

On Monday, Oxfam reported that, as income fell for 99 percent of the population, 10 of the world's richest men doubled their wealth during the pandemic. It is increasingly clear to workers, in the United States and throughout the world, that all of this death and misery has only one aim: the enrichment of a parasitic financial oligarchy.

The inevitable outcome of the horrible experience that the American and international working class is passing through is an upsurge of the class struggle, combined with the growth of socialist sentiment.

This disaster can and must be ended. As they enter into struggle against the ruling class response to the pandemic, workers must fight for a strategy of global elimination and the rejection of capitalism's demand that human lives be sacrificed for private profit.



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