

Alabama infectious disease director: “The rate of cases is like a rocket ship”

Nearly 1 million US children were infected with COVID-19 last week

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Nearly one million US children were infected with COVID-19 last week, according to statistics released by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) on Tuesday. The 981,488 new pediatric cases shatters previous records. It is four times higher than the number recorded at last year’s winter peak, triple the number of new cases from two weeks prior, and a 69 percent increase over the week ending January 6, when cases leaped by a then-staggering 580,000.

The exponential leap in pediatric cases was accompanied by nearly 2,000 new child hospitalizations last week, double the growth in the number of children now fighting for their lives in hospital beds from the week prior. As students were forced back into school buildings following the Christmas holidays, cases predictably skyrocketed, but the unprecedented scale has crushed healthcare systems nationally. During two short weeks, the US has experienced 11 percent of all child COVID-19 infections to date.

The death of a child is the most unspeakable horror, one that is now striking several American families every day. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the pediatric death total is now 1,127, while the AAP has a significantly lower count of 762. Data sets from the CDC and AAP suffer due to the deliberate lack of reporting by state and local health departments and the refusal of the Biden administration to make these numbers mandatory.

In response to the horrific reality they confront in overcrowded, poorly-ventilated schools that are now hotbeds of infection, students have organized in an effort to save their lives and those of their families, teachers and communities by walking out across the US, from New York City to Chicago to Boston to Oakland and Redondo Beach, California over the last week.

Following the remote work action by courageous Chicago teachers, educators are likewise increasingly demanding the closure of unsafe schools and building Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees throughout the country. Growing numbers are seeking to break the straitjacket of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and National Educators Association (NEA), which have demanded passive compliance with the Biden administration’s school reopening policies.

Among the children whose lives were prematurely cut short last

week was 17-year-old Taigan Bradford. A senior at Kalamazoo Central High School, she died on Tuesday, January 11, after a nearly two-month fight against COVID-19. Taigan had plans to attend Kalamazoo Valley Community College for nursing after graduating.

After her death, Taigan’s mother Omeka urged the district to close buildings and return to synchronous virtual learning. She related to local news media MLive that her daughter told her frequently about other students not wearing their masks properly in school or on the bus. Omeka Bradford pointed out that schools cannot keep up on the number of positive cases or properly keep buildings clean. Kalamazoo Public Schools reported 64 new student and 13 staff cases on January 17, bringing the total cases to 875.

In South Dakota, a second child died from COVID-19 in the last two weeks. A boy between zero and nine years old from Minnehaha County succumbed on Tuesday, January 18. The previous week, a baby less than one year old from Pennington County died. The state has only recorded 27 cases of Omicron, yet has already lost two young souls.

Not only is there a chronic underreporting of cases and deaths across the US, but these deaths are often acknowledged only weeks or months later. Among those reported last week was the October death of a Houston child, listed as “under 10” and the city’s youngest virus victim. She is one of 4,000 Houstonians who have died from COVID-19.

Just reported was the passing of Stephen Wagner, 10, a Maryland fourth-grader who played the viola in his elementary school’s Strings and Chorus group, and enjoyed trucks, fishing and bowling. Stephen died December 27 from COVID-related complications. “He made friends very easily, had a lot of friends. [He was] very well-liked by all of his teachers and the staff at the school,” Anne Arundel County Public Schools spokesman Bob Mosier said.

The family, like so many others, struggled to pay hospital and funeral expenses and posted an appeal for help on GoFundMe. According to the Maryland Department of Health, there have been four COVID-19 deaths in children ages zero to nine, and nine deaths in children ages 10 to 19. Over the past month, COVID-19

cases in children aged zero to nine increased by 40 percent, with 17,379 cases in that period, and cases of children aged 10 to 19 increased by 38 percent to 25,102 cases.

On Tuesday, the Erie, Pennsylvania, Department of Health also announced that a teenage boy died from COVID-19, the county's first COVID-19 pediatric death. The hospital which treated the unnamed teenager has admitted 13 children with COVID-19 so far in January, more than in previous months, while Erie County hospitals overall are treating more COVID-19 patients now than at any time during the pandemic. The county's 14-day moving average of daily COVID-19 hospitalizations set a record on Wednesday at 126.1.

The Erie teenager's death follows that of Pennsylvania high school student Alayna Thach, 17, who died December 13, sparking a sickout among educators in the Philadelphia area.

The surge of child infections and hospitalizations is now taking place throughout the US, with the West seeing the most dramatic rise in cases last week. According to CALmatters, California has now tallied nearly 850,000 cases of COVID among kids ages zero to 17 since the beginning of the pandemic. Of those, 44 have died, equivalent to an entire school bus filled with kids. Pediatric hospitalizations have surpassed records set during last winter's surge, reaching a high of 90 pediatric admissions in one day on January 4, according to the California Department of Public Health.

Child deaths are also on the rise internationally. A child from Calgary, Canada between five and nine years old with no pre-existing conditions was one of 23 COVID-19-related deaths over the past three days reported by the province of Alberta, where hospitalizations have soared to over 1,000. Physicians there say the highly infectious Omicron variant is sending more children to hospital than in previous waves. UNICEF has posted a total of 12,300 worldwide pediatric deaths, acknowledging the vast undercount due to a widespread lack of reporting around the world.

It is both callous and criminal that the Biden administration, the unions and the media offer the public endless lies about "safe schools," "mild disease," and the claim "there is no money" to financially support the population during a lockdown to stop the spread of the virus.

The need to expose the truth was highlighted by Dr. Mark Kline, a physician-in-chief at Children's Hospital in New Orleans, who told NBC news, "It seems like people have tried to downplay the significance of the disease in children. We've spent two years rebutting myths pertaining to COVID and children, that it's 'harmless' for children. It's not."

According to a recent study which Kline co-authored, roughly half of children hospitalized with COVID-19 needed help breathing, and nearly a third were placed in intensive care. The study also noted that a third of the 915 patients were otherwise healthy, without any underlying health problems that would have put them at greater risk.

Long-term health degradation associated with Long COVID is estimated to affect up to one in seven infected children. On January 14, the CDC additionally published a study on the increased risk of diabetes for child COVID-19 survivors, which

found, "The increased diabetes risk among persons aged less than 18 years following COVID-19 highlights the importance of COVID-19 prevention strategies in this age group." This is an ominous warning because of the long-term implication of diabetes to overall health.

Physicians across the country are raising the alarm bells. The brief statements which follow paint a picture of the prevalence of the disease and the intensity of the struggle by healthcare workers to save lives against many odds:

- Dr. David Kimberlin, a co-director of the division of pediatric infectious diseases at the University of **Alabama** at Birmingham, told NBC News, "The rate of cases in my portion of Alabama is like a rocket ship. It reflects how much virus is out there in the community. With that, we're going to see increasing hospitalization numbers." The number of children being hospitalized with COVID-19 in Alabama continues to set new records, as cases in K-12 schools have been skyrocketing. There were 16,035 new cases in Alabama schools last week, a 445 percent increase from the previous week.

- Dr. Chethan Sathya, a pediatric surgeon at Cohen Children's Medical Center in **New York**, told NBC that "literally every child" whom he and his team operated on or treated otherwise over the weekend was COVID-19-positive.

- At **Texas** Children's Hospital in Houston, positive cases among patients went from zero in early December to 70 a month later, pathologist-in-chief Dr. Jim Versalovic told the Texas Tribune. He added that child hospitalizations broke all previous pandemic records and at "breakneck speed." He cautioned against assuming that omicron is less serious for children, stating, "We cannot say that this is milder for children because it is, frankly, early."

The fight to close schools and save lives is now at the center of the class struggle in the US and internationally. The unions have proven to be faithful accomplices of the Democrats and Republicans in overseeing the homicidal school reopening campaign. To stop the needless infections, hospitalizations and deaths of children, educators, their families and their communities, the growing network of rank-and-file committees built independently of the unions and capitalist political parties must be expanded into every school and district. Sign up below to get involved.



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