

New projections estimate that up to 304,000 in the US could die from COVID-19 by mid-March

Benjamin Mateus
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This week the COVID-19 Scenario Modeling Hub, co-led by Professor Katriona Shea of Pennsylvania State University, projected that by March 12, 2022, the United States could see between 409,000 to 2,380,000 cumulative hospitalizations and 54,000 to 304,000 additional COVID-related deaths before the Omicron surge subsides. The Penn State modeling center utilizes multiple datasets to forecast their projections, which are then shared with the White House.

Such a grim prognosis demands the immediate mobilization of all public health measures to stem the tide of infections and prevent such a massive additional loss of life.

Instead, the Biden administration is offering the country hundreds of millions of adult non-surgical N95 respirators sourced from the government's Strategic National Stockpile. According to White House officials, these will be made available at local pharmacies and health centers by early February. These will barely suffice for a day or two and come at a moment when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) forecasts suggest that the peak in infections will have passed.

Additionally, each US household is to be provided four free test kits, shipped in seven to 12 days once ordered through an online portal, covidtests.com, or they can be reimbursed for purchased tests by their insurance company after a three-page form is completed, printed, and mailed or faxed. Worse, some of these rapid antigen tests are temperature-sensitive and, if they are exposed to the cold for too long, the test results are affected.

Simply put, the latest steps taken by the White House—which has ruled out any action to stop of the spread of virus, including lockdowns and school closures—are largely performative and an insult to the population, demonstrating the Biden administration's

criminal indifference to mass suffering and death.

There are currently more than 156,000 people admitted to hospitals across the United States, a pandemic high, as the variant continues to surge, diving deeper into more rural regions. With staffing shortages and sickened staff, rising admissions are pushing hospitals to overcapacity, which inevitably means that even more may die.

Marc Lipsitch of Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, who is also scientific director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) forecasting center, explained to the Associated Press (AP), "In places with extremely short staffing and overloads of patients, as the medical professionals have been telling us, the quality of care begins to suffer. That may also lead to higher death rates, but that's not in any of the models I'm aware of."

As internationally renowned infectious disease specialist and epidemiologist, Dr. Raina MacIntyre, who heads the biosecurity program at Kirby Institute in Sydney, Australia, recently noted, Omicron might be half as severe as Delta. However, Delta was twice as severe as the ancestral variant.

Even if Omicron has a predisposition to the upper airways and predilection for less severe disease, the sheer exponential rise in cases is having untold consequences in the US. New COVID-19 cases continue to be reported at blistering rates of over 730,000 per day. It also puts more children into hospitals and kills more of them than any other previous strain. University of South Florida epidemiologist Jason Salemi, speaking with AP, warned that "a lot of people are still going to die because of how transmissible Omicron has been."

According to Dr. Shea, for the period encompassing mid-December to mid-March, the central estimates predicted by the model are that 1.5 million people will be admitted

to hospitals and 191,000 will perish. The cumulative death toll for the pandemic has already surpassed 850,000, with the daily average in COVID-19 deaths over 1,800, as it continues its upward trend expected to overtake the Delta peak.

If the current projections hold, the US will record more than one million COVID deaths in the two years of the pandemic. And, as Biden celebrates his first year in office, it is noteworthy that there is hardly a distinction in the handling of this public health crisis by his administration compared to Trump's. When one follows the cumulative trajectory of deaths, a seamless ascent underscores the malignant policy pursued by the ruling elite.

Speaking with AP, Professor Shea warned, "Overall, you are going to see more sick people even if you as an individual have a lower chance of being sick." Further, she made the point that "this is Omicron driven," refuting the repeated claims that the current variant only causes mild illness.

The attempt to characterize the Omicron surge as benign and just another respiratory virus is part of the attempt to reopen schools and force workers back on the job. On Sunday, during a winter storm briefing, New York Governor Kathy Hochul reported that "the COVID clouds are parting." This is in reference to the drop in positivity rates across New York state. "Overall, the prognosis, the forecast, for COVID is much brighter than it has been before," she claimed.

Even as case numbers are trending downward, deaths in New York continue climbing, with the daily average matching those from last winter's peak of 205 deaths per day. On January 18, 2022, New York state reported 404 deaths. The last time such a figure was seen was in mid-May 2020.

Interestingly, many on social media, including epidemiologist Dr. Eric Feigl-Ding, have noted that COVID-19 deaths and excess deaths in South Africa continue to climb even though confirmed daily cases have declined and the country's leadership has put the pandemic in its rearview mirror. Journalist Chris Turnbull noted on Twitter that COVID-19 deaths are up nearly ten-fold from November, with 130 dying per day. At least 7,700 are still admitted to hospitals, of whom 1,025 remain on oxygen and 1,169 are in intensive care.

The decline in new COVID cases in the country where Omicron was first reported is plateauing, and the seven-day moving average remains over 4,000 infections per day. Placing developments in context, schools in South

Africa closed their doors on December 12, and a week later, cases across the country began to decline. On January 12, when schools across the country for primary and secondary grades resumed, the declines started to stall. The following week university students are expected back in class.

The developments in South Africa with schools are analogous to those in the US and every other country facing Omicron. The current revolt and resistance of both students and teachers are a response to the repeated infections that have devastated their communities. It is well established that schools are drivers of the pandemic. Workers in every industry must follow students and teachers and take action to bring an end to the pandemic. The political establishment that serves the financial markets cares not one iota for their well-being or safety.

As to claims that the pandemic will burn itself out after causing mass infection this winter, during Tuesday's World Health Organization COVID press conference, Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned that the pandemic is far from over.

"Omicron may be less severe, on average of course. The narrative that it is mild disease is misleading. It hurts the overall response and costs more lives," Dr. Tedros noted. "Make no mistake, Omicron is causing hospitalizations and deaths and even the less severe cases are inundating health facilities. The virus is circulating far too intensely with far too many still vulnerable. For many countries, the next few weeks remains critical for health workers and health systems ... Now is not the time to give up and wave the white flag ... This pandemic is nowhere near over and with the incredible growth of Omicron globally, new variants are likely to emerge."



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