

January: The worst month of mass illness and death in Australia since pandemic began

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1 February 2022

In the first month of 2022, working people in Australia have been brought face-to-face with the deadly consequences of the “let it rip” pandemic policies adopted by the country’s governments and the ruling elite they represent.

The scale of infection, illness and death in January dwarfs not only every previous month of the pandemic, but the toll suffered over the course of entire years in 2020 and 2021.

Some 2.15 million confirmed infections were reported in January. That means 8.6 percent of the national population contracted the virus last month.

The breakdown of the testing system when the Omicron surge began in mid-December means that the real infection figure is likely three to four times higher. In other words, it is possible that more than a quarter of the population caught the virus in the space of four-and-a-half weeks.

Many states do not report age-related infection breakdowns. But the limited figures do show that young people have been hit especially hard. At least 104,829 children aged 0–9 have caught the virus, as well as 155,882 aged 10–19. This was before the governments, with the crucial assistance of the teacher unions, reopened the schools, which is starting this week.

The largest share of infections was among 20–29-year-olds, with at least 330,414. While this undoubtedly reflects the greater general mobility of young adults, it is also bound up with large-scale workplace transmission.

Prior to the pandemic, young people accounted for 46.0 percent of short-term casual employees but just 17.4 percent of all employees. They are on the frontlines of potential infection, including in retail, hospitality and in sectors such as warehousing.

Until last July, successful measures to suppress transmission, adopted by governments under intense pressure from the working class, limited total infections to just 33,000. That is, in the first 18 months of the pandemic, 0.13 percent of the population caught the virus, compared with a minimum of 8.4 percent in the past month.

Contrary to all the official claims that Omicron is “mild”

and that infections are of no significance, record deaths have followed. There were 1,519 COVID fatalities reported in January, compared with 1,330 in all of 2021 and 909 in 2020.

By allowing the unchecked spread of the virus for two years, capitalist governments around the world have knowingly created fertile ground for new and potentially more dangerous variants. Such is the case with Omicron, which has substantially reduced the efficacy of two doses of vaccine. It has rendered the inoculated more vulnerable than previous strains, while continuing to target the unvaccinated.

All this exposes the fraudulent character of government claims that vaccines, as critical as they are, could alone end the illness and death, separated from essential public health policies such as the shutdown of non-essential businesses and schools amid mass transmissions.

In New South Wales (NSW), the largest state, health authorities have revealed the vaccination status of 680 people whose deaths were reported in January. Of those, 54 (7.5 percent) had received three doses of COVID-19 vaccine, 440 (61.3 percent) had received two doses, 20 (2.8 percent) had received one dose and 166 (23.1 percent) were unvaccinated.

Young people, despite the lies, are dying, including three aged 0–9 in January. James Kondilios, a healthy, double-vaccinated 24-year-old, perished in Sydney early last month after contracting the virus. Lachlan Moore, a 28-year-old disabled man, died in Brisbane, after being sent home from a hospital despite being seriously unwell.

The virus has again torn through the country’s largely privatised aged-care facilities, resulting in hundreds of deaths.

As is the case internationally, eugenicist positions have been adopted by governments and the corporate media. Virtually nothing is said about the victims. But if they were elderly, their age is heavily emphasised. If they had health conditions, this is dwelt upon. The thinly-veiled and fascistic subtext is that their deaths are not tragic—they were on their way out anyway.

The state health departments have adopted an extraordinarily broad range of “comorbidities,” such that few people do not have them. In NSW, “comorbidities” include common and eminently manageable conditions such as asthma and diabetes.

The state’s chief health officer, Kerry Chant, has begun bizarrely referring to “mental health problems” as a comorbidity of some who have died, despite such conditions having no conceivable impact on the severity of a respiratory virus.

Every day, the national death tolls are exceeding some of the worst mass casualty events in Australian history. On Friday, 134 deaths were reported, Saturday 95, Sunday 85.

In the 1996 Port Arthur massacre, a deranged gunman killed 35 people. That was viewed as a national tragedy, prompting the urgent overhaul of gun-control laws. In the horrific 2002 Bali bombing, 88 Australians died, together with 114 others. That attack is commemorated to this day, and was used by Australian governments to intensify their involvement in the militarist and anti-democratic “war on terror.”

But those who die of COVID are not even commemorated on the day their passing is reported. NSW Premier Dominic Perrottet contemptuously declared, amid more than 50 deaths in his state on Monday: “This is the new world. We expect those numbers to stay pretty consistent.”

More information has emerged demonstrating that the explosion of infections and deaths was nothing short of a calculated state campaign of mass murder.

In July–August, all Australia’s governments, Labor and Liberal, agreed to lift lockdowns and safety measures, based on arbitrary vaccination targets and in line with the demands of the corporate elite. When Omicron was discovered in late November, these plans were well advanced. The governments responded by allowing the virus into the country and proclaiming that its spread could be a positive, were it more transmissible but less virulent than Delta.

Perrottet proceeded with a “freedom day” on December 15, involving an end to restrictions on the unvaccinated, caps on attendance at mass venues and an indoor mask-mandate. His Victorian Labor counterpart Daniel Andrews lifted many restrictions as well, orchestrated super-spreading events and reiterated that it was necessary to “live with the virus.”

At this point, Delta transmission was stable, or decreasing, in part because of the safety restrictions the governments were dismantling. Just 1,440 infections were recorded across the country on December 1, overwhelmingly in Victoria and NSW. Those states could have eliminated transmission, as they had previously, with public health measures. Other states and territories could have remained free of COVID. But NSW and Victoria lifted all restrictions, and the other

COVID-free jurisdictions opened their borders.

On December 10, five days before “freedom day,” Perrottet was secretly warned by health officials that Omicron had a “substantial growth advantage over Delta,” and was likely to be at least partially vaccine-resistant. The clear message was that cases would explode if the reopening proceeded. This advice would have been known to Prime Minister Morrison, Premier Andrews and other state and territory leaders.

They knew that Australia’s booster roll-out, essential to providing protection against Omicron, was close to last among 70 countries reporting the progress. They also were aware that the PCR testing regime, outsourced to private pathology companies, was based on the practice of “batch testing.” Individual samples are pooled, sometimes in the dozen. If there is no trace of the virus, all samples are recorded as negative. The system only works when there is hardly any transmission.

In other words, the governments orchestrated mass infection over the holiday season, knowing the population was largely unprotected and testing would collapse. The plan was to allow massive case numbers and death over the quieter December–January period, so that it would be normalised once many businesses returned and the schools were reopened.

The record demonstrates that the working class must reject government and employer attempts to force them to “live with the virus,” and take up a fight for the scientific measures that can eliminate transmission. This is a political struggle against all the governments, the trade unions, who function as their industrial police force, and the capitalist system they all defend.



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