

# “Meaningfully milder” Omicron variant continues to kill more than 2,300 Americans each day

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The death toll caused by the coronavirus Omicron variant has risen to an average of more than 2,300 Americans a day, a figure that continues to undermine the lie promoted by media outlets such as the *New York Times* that the Omicron variant is “meaningfully milder than its predecessors.”

To put the current wave of death into perspective, it is higher than both the surge of deaths caused by the Delta variant in the fall, which peaked at just over 2,000 confirmed deaths each day, as well as the initial wave that peaked in April 2020 at more than 2,200 daily fatalities. It is still to be seen whether the current wave of death, which is still rising, will eclipse last winter’s peak of just under 3,600 deaths each day.

There are also still more than 125,000 people hospitalized across the country, including 23,000 who are in intensive care units. Hospitals remain at or near “crisis standards of care,” such as the ChristianaCare health network in Wilmington, Delaware. The 1,200-bed hospital system implemented its emergency protocols in early January, the first time in its 130-year history, and has not relaxed them since.

Even the Biden administration has been forced to tacitly acknowledge the immense danger the current variant poses. During a meeting with US governors on Monday, President Biden sat 10 feet away from everyone in the meeting, including Vice President Kamala Harris, according to the Associated Press. Everyone in the room was required to wear N95 masks instead of the far-less-protective surgical masks, and only Biden himself was given a glass of water to prevent anyone else from taking their mask off for a drink.

The devastating Omicron death toll comes as new

guidelines from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) “retire” its requirement that hospitals report to it “Previous day’s COVID-19 deaths.” The new policy was issued on January 6 and will go into effect February 2.

In effect, the HHS will no longer act as a central repository for daily in-hospital deaths caused by the coronavirus. Instead, it will be up to each state to report deaths to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), creating 50 points of potential failure and confusion as each state reports its COVID-19 deaths differently. Tennessee, for example, has only reported COVID-19 deaths on a weekly basis since December. Timely data on how many people are dying from the pandemic is no longer certain.

Alongside weakening efforts to tally coronavirus deaths, states across the country are also halting their contact-tracing efforts. Among the most recent is the Virginia Department of Health, which announced last week that it will only be doing contact tracing for “long-term care facilities and other congregate settings, healthcare settings, and other high-risk settings” because “it is not possible or fruitful to track every case.” Instead, “individuals” are encouraged to take “appropriate actions” if they suspect they have been infected, shifting the burden of basic public health measures to the population as a whole. At least a dozen other states are taking a similar approach.

The drive to limit death reporting and end contact tracing is reminiscent of remarks made by then-US President Donald Trump in the summer of 2020 that “Cases are going up in the US because we are testing far more. ... With smaller testing we would show fewer cases!”

With Biden and the Democrats, it has become “with less reporting, we will have fewer deaths!”

The reality is quite the opposite. At least 65,510 people died from COVID-19 in the US in January, including at least 72 children, according to data gathered by the American Academy of Pediatrics. Total deaths have exceeded 913,000, among them 807 children. Worldwide, more than 5.7 million men, women and children have been officially declared dead as a result of COVID-19. Excess death estimates place the true total at more than 20 million.

Moreover, many survivors will likely suffer for months or years from Long COVID symptoms. An article published in *Bloomberg* on Monday noted that an estimated one third of those who contract COVID-19 will have lingering problems that have a myriad of symptoms, from brain fog, fatigue and pain to potential immune disorders and other chronic conditions such as diabetes.

Consider just the United States, where there have been more than 76.5 million confirmed coronavirus cases, nearly a quarter of the population. Using *Bloomberg*’s estimate, that indicates that 25.5 million people, including nearly 4 million children, will develop such long-term health issues that can make life unbearable. Globally, the just under 382 million cases indicate 127 million people have contracted Long COVID, a pandemic in its own right.

Yet, efforts to stop these horrors are being scaled back as much as possible. Even the most basic of public health measures, contact tracing of infections, is being abandoned. There is, however, a certain ironic twist in the call for “individuals” to take care of themselves, as governments admit that they are unwilling and incapable of taking the steps needed to stop the pandemic. More and more, it will be those “individuals” that will see themselves not alone, but as part of the international working class, the social force that can and must end the pandemic.



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