

As US COVID-19 deaths continue to surge, corporate media maintains near blackout

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COVID-19 deaths in the United States have reached their highest level during the Omicron wave, coinciding not with escalating efforts to save lives but an escalating drive to cover up the devastating impact of the pandemic on the health of the American people.

Mandatory reporting of COVID-19 deaths by hospital systems to the US Department of Health and Humans Services (DHSS) ended on February 2, 2022.

Additionally, in quick succession, states across the country are allowing their mask mandates to lapse. New York Governor Kathy Hochul dropped the state's stringent indoor mask mandate last Wednesday. These include populous Democratic-held states, such as Illinois, California and New Jersey, to name a few.

According to the Worldometer dashboard, the 7-day moving average reached 2,600 deaths per day by the end of January. On February 1, 2022, the *New York Times* COVID-19 dashboard recorded a daily average of 2,653 deaths with a single-day high of 3,582.

Since then, the COVID-19 trackers report a sudden and significant drop in the daily death averages—2,044 for Worldometer and 2,454 for the *New York Times*. Only the Johns Hopkins coronavirus resource center, one of the leading and most reliable trackers frequently used by government and international bodies, has indicated that the number of deaths has plateaued or continues to climb though at a much slower pace. According to their tracker, the 7-day average for COVID-19 deaths remains over 2,500.

Indeed, the change in the trajectory of deaths can be supported by the decline in new infections and hospitalizations for COVID-19, although they still remain at pandemic highs. However, other countries with similar trajectories in their infection metrics have continued to see deaths climb, with Denmark and South Africa being two notable examples.

Aside from how hospital administrators and health

officials are adjusting their reports of COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths, recent efforts on the part of states and governments to dismantle reporting systems are part of the more considerable effort to dispense with such metrics altogether as they interfere with efforts to force schools and businesses to open and stay open while getting the country back to work *en masse* permanently. The critical and necessary tracking of infections has grown to become a nuisance for the ruling elite.

In this regard, the complete silence on the part of major media outlets on the number of deaths that continue to mount plays a major role. A cursory survey of the US Sunday papers is remarkable in that not one has mentioned the devastating toll the Omicron variant continues to take on the population. The rapid shift is astounding. One would assume that the pandemic has ended or that it was a nightmare from which we are all awakening. In reality, the nightmare continues in a new form.

Placing the present daily COVID-19 death toll into context, more than 2,700 people died on September 11, 2001, in the World Trade Center towers and the surrounding area after two hijacked planes were flown into the buildings. The deaths were eulogized and referenced repeatedly on every major news outlet. They were used as a pretext for US wars across the Middle East and suppression of democratic rights at home, which have had considerable relevance to developments during the pandemic.

And last week, more than 14,000 people died from COVID-19, the equivalent of almost five 9/11 events. But there is barely a mention by any media commentator. That is because these deaths are attributable, not to a terrorist "enemy," but the US ruling class itself, and both its parties, Democratic and Republican, whose deliberate policy has allowed the disease to run rampant throughout the country.

Since New Year's Day 2022, more than 90,000 people in the US have perished from COVID-19 and its complications. This is equivalent to twice the number of American combatants killed in combat in the Vietnam conflict. Instead of a war that encompassed a dozen years, the pandemic deaths took place in the span of just six weeks.

Furthermore, since President Joe Biden was sworn into office, more than a half million Americans have died of COVID-19, bringing the total number of coronavirus deaths to more than 943,000, according to Worldometer. Indeed, far more have died under Biden's administration than under Trump, as the twin parties of American capitalism pursued the policy of herd immunity.

It is noteworthy that the plans to end the last vestiges of the paltry mitigation measures were drawn up even before anyone heard of the Omicron variant. Inevitably, these had to be put on hold for several months after Omicron sparked a huge surge in the pandemic.

Last week, the *New York Times* wrote: "The easing of New York's pandemic restrictions on businesses comes as Democratic-led states from New Jersey to California have announced similar moves this week, in a loosely coordinated effort that is the result of months of public-health planning, back-channel discussions and political focus groups that began in the weeks after the November elections."

That the Omicron surge delayed only briefly this closing down of public health measures only underscores the wholly unscientific character of the decision. The federal and state governments were driven, not by data and analysis but by the necessity to recoup the trillions paid out to corporate America in the course of the pandemic.

With the number of cases on the decline (but still at staggering levels), governors took their concerns to the White House, demanding the shift to "living with the virus" under the guise that SARS-CoV-2 was on its way to becoming endemic.

New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy, also the Vice Chairman of the National Governors Association, speaking to reporters after meeting with Biden, said, "What does the road from pandemic to endemic look like, and how do we keep score? There was broad agreement that that's the task before us."

In other words, the ending of the pandemic also means the termination of all the metrics and measures that remind the population that a deadly virus continues to kill people at record highs, with the cumulative death toll approaching closer to 1 million every day.

Indeed, what does the road from pandemic to endemic look like?

The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), a UK government body that advises the central government, recently published on February 10 a paper by academics on COVID-19 viral evolution scenarios.

They provide four scenarios from the most optimistic to the direst. They wrote: "In each scenario, it is assumed that a relatively stable, repeating pattern is reached over time (two to 10 years), but it is likely that the transition to this will be highly dynamic and unpredictable. It may not be possible to know with confidence from what happens in the next 12 to 18 months which long-term pattern will emerge."

They note particularly: "There is also a feedback loop between the global epidemic dynamics (i.e., transmission and incidence) and viral evolution and adaptation: higher global SARS-CoV-2 prevalence provides more opportunities for viral evolution, while new variants can drive higher prevalence." And they warn that it should not be assumed that a more transmissible variant is necessarily of lower severity, or vice versa. On the contrary, in the worst case scenario, a more lethal and more contagious variant may emerge.

Dr. Zoë Hyde, an epidemiologist and biostatistician at the University of Western Australia and an expert on COVID-19, in response to the report wrote on social media: "The best-case scenario doesn't seem realistic [a variant of both lesser virulence and lesser transmissibility]. It's inconsistent with what's occurred so far. ... Based on our experience with SARS-CoV-2 to date, the central pessimistic scenario seems most likely to me. However, I think one element of the worst-case scenario—increased long-term impacts following infection—may also be correct."

As with the 20th and 21st centuries wars, modern pandemics are foreseeable, preventable and stoppable. Both erupt as a byproduct of deeply engrained contradictions of the capitalist mode of production. In both instances, the scale of death leads to a massive social crisis that brings to the forefront the necessity of the socialist revolution by the working class to offer a road forward.



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