

CDC director spouts anti-mask rhetoric as thousands of Americans die daily

Benjamin Mateus
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Dr. Rochelle Walensky, the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), said Wednesday, “We want to give people a break from things like mask-wearing.”

Walensky’s comments came as 2,200 people were dying on average each day in the US from COVID-19.

A poll conducted by CBS News-YouGov found that 56 percent of Americans support mask requirements for indoor venues.

Nearly one in 300 people in the US, more than 955,000, have died from COVID-19, certainly an underestimate. Already more than 80 million Americans have been infected in the two years since the pandemic began to take a foothold in the country. Yesterday, 2,184 people were reportedly killed by complications of COVID-19. Over 97 percent of counties in the country are continuing to report high rates of community transmission.

COVID-19 Scenario Modeling Hub, a modeling center based out of Penn State University that utilizes multiple datasets to forecast projections which are shared with the White House, had projected that between mid-December to mid-March the US could expect to see 191,000 deaths. Thus far, 130,000 have died and at the current pace this modeling can be construed as a highly reliable estimate.

Indeed, when the World Health Organization declared Omicron a variant of concern, the news was replete with how mild Omicron was and a cause to celebrate the mass infection that would offer the population herd immunity. These sentiments were being professed with the memory of Delta still fresh on the minds of the population.

Notably, the Omicron wave produced a peak of deaths that eclipsed even Delta’s onslaught. It was shy of last winter’s catastrophic proportions by 25 percent.

And this was despite 75 percent of the adult population having been fully vaccinated.

A recent “In the Bubble” podcast hosted by Andy Slavitt, former interim senior advisor to the COVID-19 response coordinator in the Biden administration, featuring Dr. Kristian Andersen of Scripps Clinic in La Jolla, California, raised an important question. What would an endemic infection look like?

Andersen noted that a return to 2019 normalcy would mean expecting everyone in the population to get infected at least twice a year. He added, “If we are looking at the number of deaths resulting as a result of this, we have to be realistic too that this is not going to be a common cold or flu.” Slavitt replied, “Look, I don’t think they want to say that, but I do think that implicit in this is an acceptance that there are going to be, at least in the US, 200 to 250 thousand deaths a year at baseline.”

As the estimates given by Slavitt underscore, an “endemic” state can be deadly year in and year out without an end in sight.

In Denmark, where health authorities are pursuing a policy of allowing the virus to rip whatever the consequences, daily cases continue to reach pandemic highs of over 50,000 per day. The death toll has caught up with the peak of last winter and continues to rise. More have died in this wave than any other wave during the pandemic.

The dominant strain in Denmark is BA.2, which a recent study from Japan highlighted very concerning findings. Not only is it more contagious than its distant cousin BA.1, but it also appears to cause more severe disease and may have the ability to deflect some of the important treatments used against SARS-CoV-2 infections.

Kei Sato, the researcher who conducted the study at

the University of Tokyo, explained that BA.2 is highly mutated and argued that his findings establish that BA.2 should be considered a new strain. Dr. Deborah Fuller, a virologist at the University of Washington School of medicine who reviewed the study, told CNN, “It looks like we might be looking at a new Greek letter here.”

In the US, this subvariant of Omicron is beginning to spread across the Eastern and Western seaboards. Though it accounts for less than five percent of all sequenced cases, some experts are warning it will become dominant in the US and worldwide. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, in region three, which includes Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Virginia, Delaware and Maryland, the BA.2 variant accounted for 6.2 percent of cases.

These developments coincide with the politically motivated efforts by the Biden administration to declare the pandemic over. The policies they will be implementing in the next few weeks will intersect with the growth of the BA.2 variant and will likely lead to another massive wave of infections.



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