

CDC tells Americans to take off their masks as COVID-19 death toll approaches 1 million

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On Friday, with the corporate media and political establishment diverting all attention to the war in Ukraine, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released updated guidelines which discourage people from wearing masks throughout the vast majority of the country. They are the latest in a series of unscientific guidelines that will only deepen the catastrophe that has befallen the US over the past two years.

The CDC's reckless policy change was released just weeks before the official death toll in the US surpasses 1 million, with the Worldometer site recording 973,119 deaths from COVID-19 in the US and nearly 2,000 people dying each day.

In essence, the CDC now recommends that people wear masks based on the capacity of their county's hospitals, rather than on the level of community transmission of COVID-19. Overnight, almost 70 percent of Americans magically went from living in a region of "High" to "Low" or "Medium" coronavirus threat due to the change in metrics.

Every aspect of the guidelines is unscientific. COVID-19 is primarily transmitted through microscopic aerosols that can linger in the air for hours after being exhaled by an infectious person. The use of well-fitted N95 or better masks or elastomeric respirators are among the most important tools to fight the pandemic.

Given that infectious people can spread COVID-19 while presymptomatic or asymptomatic, the only way to prevent the transmission of the virus is through the universal use of high-quality face masks, which must be mandated in every indoor public setting. If combined with the temporary closure of nonessential workplaces and schools (with full compensation for workers and small business owners), mass testing, contact tracing, improved ventilation, and every other public health measure, COVID-19 could be eliminated globally by the end of May.

By rejecting these basic scientific truths, the CDC and White House make clear that they no longer seek to stop or even slow down the transmission of COVID-19. In slides

accompanying the new guidelines, for the first time, the CDC explicitly states that it does not seek to eliminate the virus, writing that its aim is to "Shift from eliminating SARS-CoV-2 transmission towards more relevant metrics given current levels of population immunity and tools available."

Discouraging the use of masks has no basis in science or public health. Rather, it is a politically motivated decision bound up with the ruling class strategy of forcing workers to "live with the virus." It was timed to take place just days before Biden's State of the Union address, which will itself be given to a maskless audience to promote the illusion that the pandemic is over.

In response to the rapid spread of the Omicron variant, the entire political establishment has embraced the "herd immunity" strategy of mass infections pioneered by the Trump administration, now under the guise of false claims that COVID-19 is "endemic." Their aim is to make COVID-19 permanent, regardless of how many infections and deaths this causes.

Since the latest CDC guidelines were released Friday, numerous scientists, workers and anti-COVID activists have denounced the CDC and Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky for changing the guidelines and placing all Americans at greater risk of catching and transmitting COVID-19.

In one of the most widely shared tweets, Johns Hopkins University Professor of Surgery and Epidemiology Dorry Segev summed up the totally unscientific character of the CDC guidelines:

The threshold for "Low" transmission in the new guidelines increased 20-fold from the previous metric, going from 10 cases per 100,000 population to 200 cases per 100,000 population. An anonymous anti-COVID data collector graphically drew attention to this stark change in transmission thresholds:

Boston University epidemiologist Dr. Eleanor Murray noted that the new guidelines ignore the "basics of infectious disease":

Yale professor and infectious disease epidemiologist Gregg Gonsalves wrote a widely shared thread that

highlights many of the unscientific tenets of the new CDC guidelines. In one, he drew the parallels between the guidelines and the Great Barrington Declaration, which the WSWS characterized as a “manifesto of death”:

Massachusetts Latin teacher John Bracey tweeted sarcastically:

Dana Parish, an author and advocate on Long COVID, highlighted the increased dangers facing all of society and encouraged everyone to wear high-quality masks:

In contrast to these principled statements of opposition, a group of careerist scientists who have endorsed the scrapping of all mitigation measures immediately provided cover for the CDC. The most brazen was Dr. Ashish Jha, the dean of the Brown University School of Public Health and one of the most frequent guests brought onto the broadcast news channels to downplay the pandemic and justify every unscientific policy change by the Biden administration.

On Friday, before the release of the CDC guidelines, the *New York Times* published an Op-Ed by Dr. Jha, which was clearly penned well in advance of the CDC release and coordinated with the White House. In the column, he described the guidelines as “a welcome change” which are “reasonable, well-timed and consistent with the science.” He falsely claimed, “Today, because there is a high degree of population immunity, the ability of the virus to cause severe disease and death is far more variable.”

This book compiles the most critical programmatic statements, polemics, scientific analyses, interviews, and news articles published by the World Socialist Web Site on the COVID-19 pandemic. It is a social and political chronology of this world historic event based on a Marxist and Trotskyist perspective.

Ben Wakana, the deputy director of strategic communications and engagement for the White House COVID-19 Response Team, tweeted Dr. Jha’s piece and commented, “Thoughtful commentary by @ashishkjha at an important moment.”

A similar Op-Ed was published in the *Washington Post* by Leana Wen, a physician and CNN “medical analyst” who has been one of the most vocal advocates for lifting all mitigation measures during the Omicron surge.

The pronouncements of Jha, Wen, and similar highly paid academics do not hold water.

Despite the fact that a substantial section of the population is vaccinated in the US, hospitalizations and deaths skyrocketed during the Omicron surge. Only one month ago, on January 20, 2022, COVID-19 hospitalizations reached their all-time high of 159,545, with 26,471 patients in ICUs. Omicron has caused the second highest number of deaths of any surge in the US, with over 2,000 people dying almost every day over the past month.

The Omicron surge has been devastating for children, with pediatric hospitalizations and deaths eclipsing previous records set during the Delta surge last fall. As of Sunday, the CDC itself has tracked 1,430 child deaths from COVID-19. This is an increase of 84 in just eight days, or more than 10 children dying from COVID-19 every day over the past week, by far the highest increase since the start of the pandemic.

Adamantly opposed to implementing paid lockdowns and other public health measures to stop the pandemic, the Biden administration is instead engaged in a massive propaganda campaign to cover up the horrific reality that now exists.

The present scrapping of mask mandates is comparable to the CDC’s unscientific recommendation on May 13, 2021, when Dr. Walensky told vaccinated people they could stop wearing masks. This precipitated the wholesale lifting of mask mandates across the US and Biden’s infamous July 4th speech, in which he proclaimed “independence” from COVID-19. Within weeks, the horrific surge of the Delta variant began and never fully subsided before the ongoing Omicron surge. Over 330,000 Americans have died from COVID-19 since Biden’s speech last July.

The present drive to prematurely stop masking will prove even more disastrous than what took place last year. As was the case a year ago, for the roughly 7 million immunocompromised people that live in the US, for whom the vaccines provide little protection, every public space will again be hazardous. However, this time the dangers will be permanent, as every effort is made to pretend the pandemic is over.

It is necessary to draw the political conclusions from this experience. The entire political establishment, the CDC, the corporate media, and a layer of corrupt academics are wholly subservient to the ruling class and cannot be appealed to change their ways.

Instead of following the CDC’s advice to take off their masks, workers must take off the blindfold of propaganda from the politicians and corporate media demanding that they “live with the virus” and accept unending disease, death and debilitation.

The same contradictions of capitalism underlie both the criminal response to the pandemic and the escalating drive to world war. The essential task is to build an international movement of the working class to stop the war drive and instead fight to eliminate COVID-19 in every country.



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