COVID-19 infections rise in Australia as BA.2 begins to take hold

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In the past week, 203,275 COVID-19 infections were recorded in Australia, an increase of around 20 percent over the previous week, and the highest seven-day figure in a month.

The dangerous BA.2 sub-variant of Omicron has begun to take hold in Australia. According to covariants.org, BA.2 accounts for 24 percent of cases nationally. Across the country, the prevalence of BA.2 is growing at a rate of around 8.9 percent per day.

BA.2 accounts for 30 percent of recent samples sequenced in New South Wales (NSW) and 20 percent in Victoria. The small percentage of samples that are sequenced are mostly from seriously ill patients, meaning if there is an over representation of BA.2 in this data, it is because the sub-variant is causing more severe symptoms.

Across the country, only a tiny handful of positive test specimens are subjected to genomic sequencing. Each week, fewer than 2,500 sequences are reported to GISAID, the largest repository of COVID-19 samples in the world.

This is part of the criminal attempt by Australian governments to hide crucial information about the pandemic from the population and conceal the devastating and continuing consequences of the "let it rip" policy.

The media is entirely on board with the cover-up. While Australians continue to die from COVID-19 at a rate of more than 36 per day, the pandemic has virtually disappeared from the headlines.

Nevertheless, it is clear that BA.2 is spreading rapidly and is likely to become the dominant strain in Australia within weeks.

NSW Health Minister Brad Hazzard today revealed in parliament that modelling from the University of NSW (UNSW) predicted daily cases could double by mid-April as the sub-variant takes hold.

While he said the preliminary evidence was "concerning," Hazzard did not propose a return of indoor mask mandates, density limits, or other public health measures, but merely said "people need to go out and get the booster fast."

Labor Shadow Minister for Health Ryan Park agreed, posting on Twitter: "Cases could double in as little as one month. COVID hasn't been washed away with the floods. Please get boosted."

Fewer than 60 percent of adults have received a booster in NSW, compared with double-dose rates well in excess of 90 percent. The low booster take up is clearly bound up with the official propaganda barrage claiming that the pandemic is a thing of the past.

While Park raised the need to "prepare hospitals" for a surge in cases, he said nothing about reintroducing measures to actually reduce transmission.

James Wood, from the UNSW School of Public Health, said he expected 90 percent of COVID-19 infections in the state will be BA.2 by the end of this month.

Wood said the emergence of BA.2 "is the main factor driving the rise in cases."

The increasing spread of BA.2 in Australia mirrors what is taking place globally. The sub-variant is dominant in at least 34 countries, including 4 of the 10 highest-ranking countries in terms of daily infections.

In Hong Kong, where per capita death and infection rates in the current COVID-19 surge are smashing all previous records around the world, BA.2 accounts for all sequenced samples.

A recent University of Tokyo study found BA.2 is more transmissible, more vaccine evading and more resistant to previous infection than the original Omicron strain, BA.1.

In addition, the study found that BA.2 caused more severe illness than BA.1, because it reproduced deeper in the lungs of the animals studied.

Scientist Yaneer Bar-Yam told the *World Socialist Web Site* in a recent interview: "Now, obviously this is something that we still need to see in people, but if you

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realize that this is what's happening in hamsters, you should stop assuming that it's okay and you should go back and look at what's going on now."

Bar-Yam and the Tokyo study's lead scientist, Kei Sato, agreed the designation of BA.2 as a sub-variant was incorrect, as it is different enough from BA.1 to warrant its own Greek letter.

With mounting evidence that BA.2 may be the most dangerous variant yet, the World Health Organisation's refusal to classify it as a "variant of concern" in its own right is based on politics, not science.

Such a designation would conflict with the narrative relentlessly pushed by governments and the corporate media that Omicron is "mild," COVID-19 will become "endemic," and the pandemic is "over."

These utterly false and unscientific claims are designed to force children and teachers back into schools, and workers back into factories and offices, in order to satisfy the demands of big business that nothing, even the deaths of millions of people, be allowed to stand in the way of ever-increasing profits.

In fact, the only thing that is "over" is any semblance of a public health response to COVID-19, anywhere in the world except China.

Australian governments, Labor and Liberal-National alike, have in recent weeks slashed virtually all of the few remaining COVID-19 safety measures.

Daily case numbers are increasing in NSW, Western Australia (WA), South Australia, Tasmania, and the Australian Capital Territory.

In addition to the rise of the more-transmissible BA.2, the surge is being driven by growing infections in schools after students and teachers were forced back into face-to-face learning last month despite massive levels of community transmission.

Details of COVID-19 outbreaks in schools are tightly suppressed, but the Committee for Public Education has collected reports of almost 1,000 schools affected by the virus in Term 1, a fraction of the total.

It has been reported on social media that 600–700 students (more than a quarter of the school population) at Castle Hill High School are absent due to a major outbreak of COVID-19.

The Hills Shire Local Government Area, where the school is located, currently has the second-highest number of active cases in NSW, with an average of more than 500 new infections reported each day.

The bipartisan character of the murderous "let it rip" policies is starkly revealed in WA.

The state was the last in Australia to maintain at least a partial suppression policy, and maintained a "hard border" until last week. This was in no small part due to massive public support for elimination of COVID-19 demonstrated in the landslide re-election of Labor Premier Mark McGowan in March last year.

Today WA reported 4,535 new infections, more than the total recorded in the state from the beginning of the pandemic until February 23.

Since the beginning of the year, 17,000 students and 1,400 staff have either tested positive for COVID-19 or needed to isolate due to exposure.

An outbreak among bus drivers in the state forced the cancellation of around 30 bus routes on Tuesday.

Following the blueprint established throughout the country, the WA Labor government's response to the massive surge in cases was not to tighten public health measures in an attempt to stem transmission, but to slash close contact and isolation rules for school children, teachers and "critical workers"—essentially everyone who cannot work from home.

The emergence of BA.2 is an entirely predictable result of the decision by capitalist governments around the world to promote the rampant spread of COVID-19. The world has been turned into a massive petri dish for the development of an unlimited number of new and more dangerous strains of the virus.

But COVID-19 can and must be eliminated. The urgent task of the working class, in Australia and around the world, is to mobilise against the murderous "let it rip" policies of the ruling elite and fight to banish the deadly virus from the planet.

This requires a socialist perspective. Only under a workers' government can the subjugation of health and lives to the profit demands of the financial elite be ended, and the necessary public health measures to vanquish COVID, including vaccination, mask mandates and, when needed, the shutdown of all non-essential industry, be implemented.

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