Three more children die from COVID in New York City as Democratic mayor removes mask mandate

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10 March 2022

Recent statistics from the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOH) show that three more children (ages 0-17) have died of COVID-19. On March 3, New York City updated its COVID mortality data with 2 new child deaths. On March 4, it reported another. This brings the total number of children that have died from COVID-19 in New York City during 2022 to six so far, and a total of 35 since the pandemic began. No information on these children and their families has become publicly available, although if it were, it is unlikely that the corporate media would report it.

These tragic and avoidable deaths elicited no response from Democratic politicians, including Eric Adams, the mayor of the city, or Kathy Hochul, the state's governor. The corporate media almost universally has blacked out even a mention of the deaths, although the online news site Gothamist noted them, even going so far as to question an official from the DOH.

Predictably, the outlet's own comment on the deaths was in tune with the months-long government-media propaganda effort to eliminate all COVID-19 mitigation. "Pandemic interruptions to education and business have consequences, too, and people are ready to move on from the pandemic," the Gothamist noted glibly.

Testing for COVID-19 in the city is at an all-time low from a peak of 185,000 on January 4 during the Omicron surge, to less than 40,000 a day this week. This may be partly due to the thousands of home tests that the city has given out, in addition to over-the-counter sales, whose results are not recorded in any public database. The city, as a result, has no reliable measure for the COVID-19 positivity rate.

New York City announced last week that it will wind down its Test & Trace program on April 30, in keeping with the intention of state and federal authorities to stop tracking infections. On March 2, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced that it was rescinding its guidelines for contact tracing.

While COVID-19 mitigations such as testing, contact tracing and social distancing have never been rigorously implemented, they did at least provide in some tools to slow the spread. The notable exception was in the school system, where systematic under-testing gave artificially low figures of infection that allowed Mayor Adams and his predecessor, Bill de Blasio, to claim that "schools were the safest place in the city" as a part of their campaign to keep schools open during the pandemic.

The result was tens of thousands of student and staff infections and community spread of the virus during the Omicron surge that, according to one study, sickened some 47 percent of New Yorkers. Adams' open-schools policy sparked widespread dissent from educators and parents and student walkouts in January.

The most egregious and dangerous abandonment of COVID-19 mitigations in the city came on Monday, when students and staff were no longer required to wear masks in schools. This, too, followed a policy set by the Biden administration and implemented by the CDC and Democratic state governors. Already the masking mandates had been abolished in New York state outside of schools and public venues.

Students between 2 and 5 years old will be required to mask because they are too young to be vaccinated. According to city statistics, however, only 56 percent of children between 5 and 17 are fully vaccinated. The figure is lower in poorer neighborhoods. The city has also lifted the already inadequate social distancing guidelines in school classrooms and auditoriums. Children who have been infected with COVID-19 are not required to test negative before they return to school.

In a public statement, Adams repeated the unmasking canard that has been circulating in right-wing circles for months, and is now adopted by the Democrats, 'We want to see the faces of our children." Adams linked the dropping of

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this last COVID-19 mitigation to his plans to drop vaccination requirements for restaurants and other businesses. As he toured restaurants around the city on Monday, Adams remarked, “I got to get my businesses open. I have to get people back in their offices.”

The United Federation of Teachers (UFT) fully endorsed Adam’s decision to drop the masking mandates. It issued a statement saying, “Our union’s doctors agree with the city that it is the right time to safely move to an optional mask system as long as all testing remains in place.” As it has since March 2020, the UFT is doing whatever it can to facilitate the needs of the ruling class among educators. The consequences have been deadly.

When the UFT says that it is the “right time,” to drop the masking mandate, it is condemning its membership to sickness and death. Infections from the BA.2 variant of COVID-19 are doubling every two weeks in New York State as a portion of positive tests that are genetically sequenced, now accounting for about one in ten of those cases.

This follows a pattern internationally and, in the US, where BA.2 is now supplanting the omicron BA.1 variant. BA.2 is estimated by some scientists to be 30 percent more contagious that BA.1. Other studies show that the variant may be more vaccine-evading than BA.1 and that previous infection with BA.1 may offer little immune protection.

The working class of New York City has been abandoned to mass infection from COVID-19 by the Democratic Party. This is nowhere truer than with educators, who, during the Omicron surge, endured their own sickness and that of children, absent colleagues and students herded into auditoriums.

The dangers of removing masks and other COVID-19 mitigations have been suppressed in the corporate media. When serious discussion or doubts do emerge, they are completely overlaid by war hysteria on the Ukraine conflict, one of the desired purposes of the Biden administration in provoking conflict in the region.

That has not muted a forceful reaction by educators, in particular to the lifting of the masking mandate. Most understand very well that it well further spread the virus.

One educator on Twitter remarked in response to Adams, “The whole idea of ‘Take off your mask! I want to see you smile!’ is so ghoulish to me because it uses sweetness as a package for what is really an aggressive attempt to dominate and exercise power over someone weaker.”

Another educator said, “@NYCMayor has made the entirety of NYC unsafe for medically vulnerable people.”

A New York City parent commented, “consider the implications of making these decisions based on politics rather than the science.”

A Brooklyn teacher told the *World Socialist Web Site*: “Instead of listening to experts and acting in accordance, we listened to businessman [and Biden’s pandemic Czar] Jeffery Zients and discarded social distancing measures and lifesaving restrictions. We sacrificed eradication to protect corporations; the safety of our working families to protect the sanctity of profit; remote learning to protect our politicians’ war chests; and the safety of our workers to protect the economy. But nowhere in that equation, was one iota sacrificed to save the life of a child or a parent.

“Dropping the mask mandate is nothing less short of criminal. In a month to six weeks’ time, hospitals will be full again, deaths will rise; and politicians will say they never saw it coming. AGAIN. How much longer do we continue to tolerate such malfeasance before it becomes a crime against humanity?”

Linda, a parent from the Bronx told the WSWS: “I feel our mayor doesn’t care enough to know what's right and wrong or knows enough to stop telling lies to the people and the world that we're safe and you can unmask yourself when you don't actually know we are all safe from this virus. It has been here for two years. I don't feel this virus is gone. If that's the case, three kids wouldn't have passed on at such early age.”

The pandemic is not over, and the danger of world war has now become a threat to the lives of millions. The Northeast Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee met on March 4 to discuss the relationship between the war drive against Russia by the American ruling class, both in its historical origins since the collapse of the USSR in 1991, and its relationship to the herd immunity policy now being imposed on the working class.

Teachers on the committee emphasized the need for a break with the UFT and for action to eliminate COVID-19. The need for independent organizations of workers to fight the drive to world war was also raised during the meeting. In particular, the meeting focused on the class issues that lay at the root not only of war and the spread of COVID-19, but also in the development of an international movement by the working class to stop war and to eliminate the pandemic.

Educators, parents and students who would like fight against world War III and for the elimination of COVID should join the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee.

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