With 616 children already killed by COVID-19 this year

Omicron BA.2 subvariant threatens to deepen record surge of US child deaths

Emma Arceneaux
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The staggering rise in child deaths seen throughout the Delta and Omicron waves of the pandemic in the United States continues to reach new heights, with COVID-19 now the leading cause of death by disease in children.

According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Demographics Data Tracker, there have been 1,656 pediatric COVID-19 deaths as of March 12, 2022. Seventy percent of these (1,156) have occurred since September 2021. Since the start of 2022, a staggering 616 deaths have been added, representing 37 percent of the total.

So far this year, each month has been deadlier than the last. The increases during February and March of this year have been particularly dramatic, with the weekly total additions increasing every week for the past six weeks (see graphs 2 and 3). In the first two weeks of March, 226 child deaths were recorded by the CDC, more than all of January or February, at an unprecedented average rate of 18.8 deaths per day.

Although this data set does not include dates of death, the increases recorded since the fall coincide with the full reopening of schools and the record infections and hospitalizations of children during this same period. Another limitation of this data is that it does not include location.

On Monday, using data from the CDC, health care expert Gregory Travis, who has been tracking the impact of COVID-19 on children, tweeted a graph showing that COVID-19 is now the leading cause of death by disease among children, and the fifth leading cause of death overall among children.

Additional evidence continues to emerge dispelling the lie that COVID-19 is comparable to other common respiratory viruses in children, namely influenza and RSV (respiratory syncytial virus).

A study published in the JAMA network in late February found that among hospitalized children, those diagnosed with multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C) as a result of a COVID-19 infection had the highest incidence of cardiovascular, hematologic, kidney and gastrointestinal complications, compared with patients diagnosed with COVID-19 without MIS-C, influenza and RSV. Children hospitalized with COVID-19 without MIS-C had the highest rate of neurological complications.

The median cost for a hospital stay among children diagnosed with COVID-19 ($10,399) and with MIS-C ($23,585) were approximately 2 and 4.5 times the median cost of an influenza hospitalization ($5,200).

The mass infection of children is ongoing. According to the latest "Children and COVID-19" report by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), during the week ending March 10, another 41,631 children were infected and 403 were hospitalized with COVID-19. In total, 12,752,636 children have officially been infected in the US. The report also added another 17 pediatric deaths across 13 states, including three in both New York City and Michigan.

The AAP data, particularly on hospitalizations and deaths, are quite limited. Only 25 states plus New York City publish age distribution data for hospitalizations. The vast discrepancy in cumulative child deaths—931 compared to the CDC's current figure of 1,656—is due to the fact that the AAP report uses public state-level reports, whereas the CDC also receives direct reports from local jurisdictions and hospitals. For instance, Texas' cumulative child death toll of 127, the highest of any state, has not been updated in the AAP report since February 3, 2022.

While the overall seven-day average for daily deaths in the US remains above 1,200 and the official death toll approaches 1 million, all attention has been diverted away from the ongoing mass casualty event inside of the US and towards the Russia-Ukraine war, which Washington and its NATO allies are exploiting to carry out longstanding plans for regime change in Russia and to shift internal social tensions onto an external enemy.

One can Google "Mariupol hospital" and find thousands of articles devoted to the Russian bombing of a nearly vacant maternity hospital that left three people dead, while there is no commensurate coverage for the hundreds of children's deaths being reported by the CDC each week in the US.

This is in line with the general trend throughout the pandemic in which both capitalist parties, the corporate media, and the CDC itself have downplayed the dangers of COVID-19, undermined and outright rejected the necessary public health measures needed to contain and eliminate the virus, and refused to coordinate a massive education campaign on the necessity and safety of vaccines.

The last failure is especially evident in the low rates of vaccination among eligible children, the lowest of any age group. According to the CDC, as of March 14, only 26.5 percent of 5–11

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year olds and 55.9 percent of 12–17 year olds have received two doses of the vaccine.

Meanwhile, children ages 0–4 remain ineligible for vaccination. In February, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) delayed its Advisory Committee Meeting on the emergency use authorization for Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine for this age group after trials showed two shots of the 3 microgram dose to be ineffective against the Omicron variant.

The agency is awaiting data from Pfizer's trial on a third dose before moving forward with emergency use authorization. Significantly, this age group represents the largest share of pediatric deaths from COVID-19, with 517 total deaths recorded by the CDC as of March 12.

While the full impact of the Omicron surge on children continues to unfold, the stage has been set for yet another and possibly worse wave to come.

Across the world, the Omicron BA.2 subvariant is rapidly spreading and leading to record infections in multiple countries throughout Asia and Europe. In Hong Kong, per capita hospitalizations and deaths have surpassed previous world records throughout the pandemic. In Germany, daily infections have set new records in the country for the past three days.

In the United Kingdom, where cases are rising again after the Omicron peak in January, hospitalizations are rapidly increasing. UK Journalist Chris Turnbull posted a series of tweets on Monday about the alarming growth in hospitalizations among children over the past week.

While admissions among all age groups increased by 23 percent between March 2–9, admissions among infants and toddlers jumped 45.8 percent and 32 percent among ages 6–17. Turnbull noted that many parents have reported their children were reinfected with BA.2 only weeks after being infected with BA.1.

It is only a matter of time before the BA.2 subvariant takes hold in the US. Already, the decline in cases has nearly stagnated. Following the unscientific and reckless changes to masking recommendations by the CDC in February, Democratic-led states across the US have ditched statewide mask mandates, including in schools. The virus has preemptively been given free rein to infect and disable the population.

The promises by Biden and the major teachers unions that a Democratic administration would "follow the science" and keep children safe in schools has been exposed as a fraud. In every significant way, the Biden administration has followed Trump's "herd immunity" playbook, including by reducing in-hospital death reporting, removing mitigation measures, and demanding the population accept a "new normal" of mass infection.

In February 2021, Biden infamously lied to a second-grader during a town hall meeting when he said, "Kids don't get … COVID very often. It's unusual for that to happen." Since February 2021, more than 9 million children in the US have contracted COVID-19.

Perhaps the most egregious silence on the devastating impact and ongoing dangers of COVID-19 for children comes from Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT).

Throughout the pandemic, Weingarten has earned the contempt of educators and parents across the US for her central role in forcing through the reopening of schools, stifling rank-and-file opposition to the return to unsafe classrooms, and her cozy relationship with far-right parents groups Open Schools USA and Great Barrington Declaration author Jay Bhattacharya.

Most recently, when not preoccupied tweeting her support for the US intervention in Ukraine, Weingarten is praising the end of pandemic mitigations. On March 12 she tweeted, "I'm so grateful that we're in a new phase of the pandemic, with the ability to be in person, maskless if you feel comfortable, and returning to normalcy."

One searches in vain for any recognition by Weingarten of all the children who have died as a result of the full reopening of schools or the more than 2,300 educators who have perished throughout the pandemic, according to an unofficial tracker. Indicative of the growing hostility among educators toward her, Weingarten has disabled all public comments on her tweets.

Despite the treachery of the trade unions, educators and other sectors of the working class continue to struggle against dangerous working conditions and falling wages amid soaring inflation. The teachers' strike in Minneapolis, which Weingarten has already tried to sabotage by isolating it from the struggle in St. Paul, is the latest in a series of educator and student strikes that have occurred throughout the pandemic.

The essential lessons of the past two years must be assimilated by the working class. Under conditions in which over 6 million have officially died from the pandemic, with 18 million excess deaths confirmed in a recent report in the *Lancet*, every advanced capitalist country except China has dropped all remaining measures to restrict the spread of the virus. This is not an accidental miscalculation but a deliberate policy to surrender the population to the pandemic.

The same capitalist politicians that have let millions of people needlessly die from COVID-19 are stoking what is quickly escalating into World War III which threatens an exchange of nuclear weapons. On multiple fronts humanity faces existential threats. It is decisive that the international working class, supported by the youth, takes up a conscious fight against capitalism and builds a mass socialist movement to eliminate COVID-19 and stop the danger of war.

Note: On March 16, the COVID Data Tracker Demographics section updated with a significant decrease in death counts across all age groups, including a decrease in the pediatric death toll by 416. In reply to an inquiry by the WSWS, the CDC said that 72,277 deaths were removed because 'CDC's algorithm was accidentally counting deaths that were not COVID-19 related.' It remains unclear whether the CDC revised its criteria for classifying COVID-19 deaths, and whether a correction to this article is necessary. For more information, read this article.

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