

Media charlatan Ashish Jha takes the helm of Biden's COVID-19 response team

Evan Blake
11 April 2022

On Monday, Dr. Ashish Jha took over for multimillionaire Jeff Zients as the White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator, under conditions in which the Omicron BA.2 subvariant is now dominant across the US and is causing a new surge of COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations in a growing number of states.

Data from the *New York Times* shows that COVID-19 cases are rising in 26 states, Washington D.C. and two territories, while the nationwide seven-day average of daily new cases has increased by 3 percent in the past week to 31,105. The states with the largest increase in new cases include Rhode Island (up 68 percent), New Jersey (67 percent) and New York (up 60 percent in the past two weeks), as BA.2 became dominant in the Northeast two weeks ago. In New York, 1,060 people are now hospitalized due to COVID-19, up 27 percent from a week ago.

Over the past three months, there has been a concerted, bipartisan effort to do away with all remaining mitigation measures to slow the spread of COVID-19, cover up data and restrict access to testing. Uninsured Americans no longer have access to free testing, which is now at its lowest level since July 2021. According to the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), the likely number of daily new cases in the US now stands at close to 317,000, roughly 10 times the official number of infections.

As the WSWS noted on the selection of Dr. Jha to replace Zients, “Jha was chosen because he is a ‘household name’ who over the past two years has been brought onto the broadcast news shows on a near-daily basis to issue soporifics and disarm the population to the immense dangers posed by the pandemic.”

Right on cue, Jha spent his first hour on the job Monday appearing on three of the broadcast news morning shows that have interviewed him dozens of times before: NBC's

Today, *CBS Mornings*, and MSNBC's *Morning Joe*.

In each appearance, Jha downplayed the dangers of BA.2 and covered up the catastrophic record of the Biden administration, which has allowed at least 570,000 Americans to die from COVID-19. He also voiced his support for the unscientific masking guidelines issued by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in late February, which now belatedly recommend masking in a given county only once hospitals begin to reach capacity.

On NBC's *Today*, when asked about BA.2 and the likelihood of another surge of infections, Jha replied, “I am not overly concerned right now. Case numbers are rising. We were expecting this, because we saw this in Europe a few weeks ago. But the good news is we're coming off of very low infection numbers.” He reiterated, “I don't think this is a moment where we have to be excessively concerned.”

On *CBS Mornings*, Jha stated bluntly, “I don't think we need to make any substantial changes at this point.”

On MSNBC's *Morning Joe*, Jha said that BA.2 is “causing a little bump in cases here in the United States, but we're still at extremely low levels.” This is reminiscent of Jha's comment on CNBC on July 22, 2021, as the Delta surge was well underway, when he said, “We're seeing little bumps of cases in places like Vermont and Massachusetts that have high vaccination rates. They're fine, their hospitals are fine, they're not likely to get overwhelmed.” Just months later, hospitals throughout the Northeast had reached their capacity.

When asked Monday morning what vaccinated people should do if knowingly exposed to COVID-19 and possibly infected, Dr. Jha replied, “If you've been exposed and now you have symptoms, you should continue testing, and I think in the first day or two it's reasonable to assume that you may very well have it. And that means don't go out into crowds, don't go out and

spend time with a whole lot of other people, until you've got that negative test."

The implication of this statement is that people knowingly exposed to others infected with COVID-19 no longer need to isolate whatsoever, and can congregate with their elderly parents or grandparents, so long as they "don't go out into crowds." This goes even further than the unscientific guidelines on isolation and quarantine adopted by the CDC during the Omicron BA.1 surge.

Last week, just blocks away from the White House where Dr. Jha spoke on the morning news, a super-spreader event at the annual Gridiron Club dinner triggered an outbreak that ripped through the Washington elite. At least 72 top political, media and business figures were infected with COVID-19.

Attendees at the exclusive event, who included Drs. Anthony Fauci and CDC Director Rochelle Walensky, were not required to wear masks or even take a COVID-19 test before entering the building. They were required only to supply proof of vaccination, not even of booster shots, which in any case do not provide immunity from infection, only protection against serious complications and death.

Among those in attendance was New York City Mayor Eric Adams, who announced Sunday that he has tested positive for COVID-19. Adhering to the wisdom of Dr. Jha, despite the fact that the Gridiron Club gala was identified as a super-spreader event as early as Tuesday, Adams went on a whirlwind tour throughout last week. This included going maskless to an event supposedly meant to honor disabled people, most of whom were at-risk for more severe disease from COVID-19.

In his *CBS Mornings* interview, Dr. Jha also made self-contradictory statements on COVID-19 testing, saying, "We've had under-counting throughout the whole pandemic, and that has always been an issue. ... I do feel like we have a pretty good grip of the overall picture. But no doubt about it, obviously we're not capturing every infection, especially with people doing more home tests."

Since the start of the Omicron BA.1 surge, the Biden administration has promoted at-home rapid tests, which do not show up in official statistics and disqualify Long COVID patients from receiving treatment at already limited clinics.

Significantly, Dr. Jha made no mention of Long COVID and the fact that studies indicate that at least 10 percent of breakthrough infections among fully vaccinated people can cause long-term debilitation, with a wide range of symptoms that can impact nearly every organ in the body.

What Dr. Jha referred to as "extremely low levels" of infection at present equates to at least 3,000 Americans who will likely develop Long COVID each day.

Contrary to the fairytale narrative spun by the media and the political establishment, at the nexus of which now stands Dr. Jha, the BA.2 surge has begun and in all likelihood will be devastating in the coming weeks and months.

To get a real sense of the dangers that exist, one need only to compare conditions in the United Kingdom with those in the US.

Both the UK and the US experienced horrific waves of BA.1 over the winter, with comparable rates of infection per million population. Within weeks of BA.2 becoming dominant in the UK, infections rapidly spiked, and by last week hospitalizations surpassed the peaks reached during the BA.1 surge. Roughly 27 percent more of the UK population has received a necessary third dose of vaccine than the US population, indicating that BA.2 could prove far worse in the US than the UK.

Also on Monday, Philadelphia became the first major city to announce that it will reinstate a citywide mask mandate in indoor public places in response to the BA.2 surge. The city had lifted the mandate only five weeks ago, but was compelled to reinstate it after cases rose over 50 percent in just 10 days, reaching an average of 142 cases per day.

Despite the nostrums of charlatans like Ashish Jha, the objective reality that the pandemic is nowhere near its end will come crashing down, either from BA.2 or whatever variant comes next. In order to stop further needless suffering and death from COVID-19 once and for all, the American working class must unite with workers internationally and take up the fight to eliminate COVID-19 worldwide.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)