

As “invisible” pandemic spreads in New York City, another child dies of COVID-19

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Thirty-six children ages 0-17 have now died of COVID-19 in New York City since the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020, according to data updated by the city last week. Seven of these children have died in 2022 and one in the last week.

The latest child death was not worth mentioning by the city’s billionaire-friendly Democratic mayor, Eric Adams, or by the major newspapers and media outlets. No warning was issued that children remain vulnerable to this disease. And no pledges were made to protect them and the rest of the population, much less active measures taken by a single politician in this Democratic Party-dominated state and city to stop a new wave of COVID-19 from spreading throughout the city.

Rather, headlines have focused on Adams’ law-and-order campaign, especially the brutal clearing of homeless encampments by the police and the fallout from the subway shooting on April 12 by a mentally unstable man, which injured almost 30 people but killed no one. The mayor has vowed to double the number of police officers in subway stations and has called for a slew of repressive measures including everything from increased internet surveillance to tougher sentencing for crimes.

For a city that has lost over 40,000 people to COVID in the last two years, there has been a remarkable lack of official notice or media discussion of the fact that over the last two weeks, according to data collected by the *New York Times*, there has been a 48 percent increase in the daily average of new COVID cases and a 25 percent increase in daily deaths from the disease.

Eleven people in the city died of COVID-19 on April 18. While the official test positivity rate as measured by the city is at 4.76 percent, this figure is deceptive. Many New Yorkers now use home tests which have been distributed en masse by the city. Not only do these rapid tests often give results less reliable than PCR tests, but the results are also seldom reported to any city or state authority. Nevertheless, some areas of Manhattan such as the Financial District and Lincoln Square are now registering a 15 percent positivity rate. This follows the same pattern as that of the Omicron surge in December, with wealthier areas of Manhattan peaking first.

Over 80 percent of cases that are sequenced are from the BA.2 subvariant of Omicron, which is even more contagious

than the original variant.

The city’s health commissioner, Dr. Ashwin Vasan, could only lamely state on Friday: “In the next few days, likely by early next week, we’re going to be entering a new level of risk, moving from a low-risk environment to a medium-risk environment on the basis of cases.” This statement is purely for public relations purposes. The “mild” designation is almost certainly an understatement.

In the four months since the peak of the Omicron surge, Adams and the state’s Democratic governor, Kathy Hochul, have overseen the dismantling of almost all COVID mitigation measures. Most notoriously, in March Adams rescinded the masking mandate for children over 5 years in schools as well as the indoor vaccination mandate.

New York City Health + Hospitals folded up its contact tracing program, which was inadequate to begin with, but presumably provided some information about the spread of the disease.

Broadway’s 41 theaters have extended their mask mandate until May but have rescinded the proof of vaccination requirement as of April 30.

Some partial mitigation measures have been taken in the city with the recent rise in cases. Columbia University, for example, reimposed its mask mandate in classrooms last week and other institutions, such as New York University (NYU), continue to require masking in areas where attendance is “mandatory,” such as in classrooms, though not in the student center. NYU students have told the *World Socialist Web Site* that there has been an increase in voluntary mask-wearing by students out of fear of the renewed spread of the virus.

Anecdotal evidence shows that students in some schools are masking and in others are not. Educators, for the most part, have continued masking but are forbidden to ask their students or colleagues to do so. School reporting of positive cases, concealed and undercounted by the Department of Education (DOE) at all periods of the pandemic, is practically nonexistent now.

One educator told the *World Socialist Web Site* of hearing a parent call in to her principal’s office to report that her child was sick with COVID, but no announcement was made to the faculty, staff or other parents. Testing in schools, a sham which

the Democratic city administration used to show artificially low positivity rates in schools, has also largely ceased.

Some reports in the media have calculated as much as a 40 percent student absentee rate in New York City public schools, although the DOE has not confirmed this.

Meanwhile Mayor Adams has chosen not to fight a court-ordered injunction against his decision to drop the mask mandate for preschoolers. No doubt the rising caseload and the opposition it has generated was also a factor in Governor Hochul's decision to keep a masking mandate on the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's (MTA) subways, commuter rails and buses after a federal judge struck down mask mandates on airplanes and other forms of public transportation on Monday. Also on Monday, the ride-share company Uber, widely used in New York City, announced that it was rescinding its mask mandate.

Adams himself announced on April 10 that he contracted COVID-19. As of Monday, after only eight days of isolation, he began attending in-person events. On April 2, he attended the Gridiron Club dinner in Washington D.C., a maskless, mass infection event that sickened a swath of Democratic Party leaders. Some observers noted that Adams was almost certainly infected with the virus in the days before his announcement, during which he appeared maskless at large events.

Despite the threats to their own health and that of the whole population, New York Democratic Party politicians remain firm in their policy of mass infection. On Sunday, in response to questions about rising positivity rates in the state, Hochul told the media: "I'm going to protect the health of New Yorkers, but I'm also protecting the economy ... I'm not going to shut it down again, you can count on that."

With the relaxation of mandates after the Omicron surge—when the mayor said nothing and did nothing about the massive spread of the virus in the schools—New York City is now even more vulnerable to the disease than it was four months ago. The state and federal suppression of COVID statistics and the general silence of the media on the human toll of the virus are an effort to make this phase of the pandemic "invisible."

Educators, parents of students in school, medical professionals and many other workers in the city, however, have learned something in the last two years: distrust of the pronouncements of the Democratic Party politicians and corporate media is high. Many on social media have noticed increased illnesses and have reported themselves, their children and friends testing positive for COVID-19. Concern is widespread.

One New York educator tweeted, "Turns out dropping the mask mandate was pure stupidity. My students and fellow staff members are getting sick like crazy ... including me."

Many educators are raising the alarm. Another tweeted: "Spending the first morning of a much needed break texting with other parents, wondering if we're going to have to pull

our kids out of school again this year after the break because @NYCMayor & NYC DOE have zero plan or on-ramps to school covid mitigations as cases surge."

A parent posted on Reddit: "My kid's school has a 80%+ vax rate and more than a 1/3 of the class has gotten COVID this school year. I know since omicron, even the vax kids are getting it."

A special needs pre-K teacher spoke anonymously to the WWSW on conditions in her school in the aftermath of Omicron.

"Our safety is not being prioritized in the way that I feel like it should be because we are the people that are taking care of everybody's children and educating everybody's children. I just do not feel like teachers are being recognized for the risks that we are putting ourselves at and how stressful it is to be doing our job and then you have a kid who is sneezing, and you do not know, does this kid have COVID?"

"There are no procedures in place to try to figure that out. There is not enough testing and there is not enough contact tracing. We do not even have an isolation room at my school so when a kid is sick, they are usually sent back to the classroom to wait for a parent to pick them up. The nurses are not trained to isolate the kids. Nothing like that goes on."

Just as they have learned to reject the lies that come out of the Democratic Party politicians' mouths, educators, parents and students, along with all New York City's working class, must draw political conclusions about the high risk of allowing the capitalist class to stay in power. This is not only because of COVID, but because of the potentially even more dangerous conflagration that is being fanned by NATO and the US in Ukraine. The International May Day online rally sponsored by the *World Socialist Web Site* will mark a significant turn in world politics and be a milestone in the fight against COVID-19.



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