

# Half of all Americans infected with COVID-19, three-quarters of children

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The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced Tuesday that almost 60 percent of the US population had been infected with COVID-19 at least one time by the end of February 2022, when the most recent Omicron BA.1 wave ebbed. Even this staggering figure was outstripped by the 75 percent of all children and adolescents who were infected at least once by the same point.

This is a public health catastrophe unprecedented in American history. It is not a “natural” disaster but the product of a deliberate policy of mass infection, carried out first by the Trump administration and now by the Biden administration. The Republican Party and then the Democratic Party have demonstrated their class character, as they sacrificed a million lives—and counting—in order to maintain the operations of corporate business and ensure the uninterrupted flow of profits to the American capitalist oligarchy.

During the same period that COVID-19 killed 1 million people and infected 200 million, the stock market roared to record heights and the fortunes of the financial aristocracy swelled to unimaginable proportions. The wealth of US billionaires rose by more than 70 percent, to over \$5 trillion. These two outcomes—mass death and unprecedented wealth—are inextricably linked. Wall Street’s Midas touch has turned mass suffering and death into gold.

And SARS-CoV-2 has not finished its deadly work. Far from it. Thanks to the effective end of all mitigation measures, the resumption of “normal” life in terms of workplaces, schools, shopping centers, social gatherings, mass travel and mass arena events, and the ending of masking and other limited forms of protection, the virus is being furnished with a virtually unlimited supply of new victims and new opportunities for mutation.

There are 100 million Americans who are entirely unvaccinated, 130 million vaccinated but not boosted, and a further 100 million whose boosters are waning rapidly in effectiveness. These large and varied pools of potential victims provide optimal conditions for a virus that mutates quickly in response to changed conditions. SARS-CoV2 has

been given an invitation, not merely to entrench itself as a permanent factor in human life, but to develop new variants that are more infectious, more vaccine-resistant and more lethal.

A particularly cruel element of the policy of allowing the virus free rein is its impact on children and adolescents. The 75 percent infection rate demonstrates that the reopening of schools to in-person instruction turned the education system into a main driver in the spread of the pandemic, as the WSWS and many rank-and-file teachers warned. Children are not unlikely to contract COVID-19—as both Trump and Biden falsely claimed—but are equally or perhaps even more susceptible to the deadly disease.

Over 1,500 children in the US have already died from COVID-19. The pandemic has only entered its third year, and already there are estimates that Long COVID—the umbrella term for continuing consequences of infection, including damage to the brain, heart, lungs and other vital organs—may be as high as 30 percent. Who authorized the government to conduct a medical experiment of such dreadful proportions on innocent children?

The CDC report noted the phenomenal acceleration of the infection during the Omicron surge. During the Delta wave, which began a year ago and reached its peak in the fall, new infections in the United States averaged 1 to 2 percent of the US population per month (3.3 million to 6.6 million cases). But during the three months ending in February 2022, there were some 80 million new cases, more than 25 million cases per month. An estimated 21 million children were among those newly infected.

Despite attempts to characterize the Omicron variant as mild, Omicron already accounts for almost 1 in 5 of total COVID-19 deaths. And now that the original Omicron BA.1 subvariant has been supplanted by BA.2, which is more infectious and potentially more virulent, a new surge in the pandemic is on the horizon. Infection with BA.1 apparently incurs little or no immunity from a repeat infection by BA.2.

In the face of these grim figures, the Biden administration is pushing ahead with the policy of mass infection, which

was once described under the Trump administration as “herd immunity” and now goes by a different label—endemicity, or “living with the virus.” While Trump advocated quack remedies like ivermectin and hydroxychloroquine, the Biden White House has simply dropped any pretense that COVID-19 can or should be prevented.

Dr. Ashish Jha, the newly installed White House pandemic coordinator, declared this openly at his first press briefing Tuesday, saying, “It is going to be hard to ensure that no one gets COVID in America. That’s not even a policy goal.” No one in the White House press corps questioned that assertion, since the corporate media accepts the premise that prevention is impossible, and even undesirable.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, Biden’s chief adviser on the pandemic, said the same day that the United States is now “out of the pandemic phase,” hailing the decline in daily deaths from 3,000 in January to an average of 300 a day last week. “I believe that we’re transitioning into endemicity,” he said, using a term which implies that COVID-19 has become a permanent, and acceptable, feature of American life.

In a further step in the campaign to “normalize” COVID-19, Biden himself appears to be deliberately courting infection, knowing that with the immense medical resources available to the White House, including Paxlovid and other therapeutics, he faces little personal danger. After Vice President Kamala Harris tested positive, there was no change in Biden’s schedule, and White House aides went out of their way to suggest that they were not unduly concerned over the possible impact of infection on the 79-year-old president.

Biden’s seemingly reckless actions include delivering a eulogy to former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright at a memorial service Wednesday at the National Cathedral, packed with official mourners. The president is also scheduled to attend the White House Correspondents’ Association annual dinner on Saturday night, along with about 2,600 officials, journalists and others in a basement hotel ballroom. Last month’s similar but smaller Gridiron Club dinner resulted in more than 1 in 10 attendees contracting COVID-19.

The United States leads the world in COVID-19 deaths, despite being the richest country in the world and preeminent in medical technology, because the American population has fewer social benefits, including access to health care, than any other industrialized society, and the ruling class has fewer limits. But the recklessness and criminality of the American financial oligarchy’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic have only set the pace for capitalist ruling classes all over the world.

The COVID-19 death toll in Europe is approaching 2

million. Some 1.7 million have died in Latin America, where the death rates in Mexico, Brazil, Peru and other countries rival or exceed those in the US. Uncounted millions have died in the Indian subcontinent, disguised only by the refusal of right-wing governments, like that of Narendra Modi in New Delhi, even to tally the victims. There are huge new outbreaks in Indonesia, South Korea and Australia. South Africa has seen mass casualties, and the pandemic is spreading through that continent as well.

Only in China has there been a serious effort to carry out a scientifically based Zero-COVID policy, with the result that there have been fewer than 5,000 deaths in a country of 1.4 billion people since the pandemic began in December 2019. Most of these occurred in the first four months, before the nature of the infection was fully understood.

COVID-19 has occasionally been compared to the influenza epidemic after World War I, which took more lives, some 50 million, than that appalling slaughter. The current pandemic may well precede the outbreak of global war, rather than follow it. But there is a clear connection: The same ruling class that accepts and even encourages millions of dead in the pandemic will not shrink from World War III because of the prospect that millions, or even tens and hundreds of millions of people, may die in a nuclear exchange.

The latest milestone in the coronavirus pandemic comes only days before the May Day rally called by the WSWS and the International Committee of the Fourth International, and it underscores the basis of that rally. The working class is facing a globally interconnected struggle for its democratic and social rights and even its physical survival. This can only go forward as a consciously revolutionary struggle for socialism and the overthrow of the capitalist system, the underlying cause of war, disease and all other social ills.



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