

COVID-19 cases rise in the Mid-Atlantic as school districts refuse to impose any safety measures

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The Mid-Atlantic United States, home to nearly 60 million people, has seen a drastic increase in the number of people infected with the latest coronavirus variants. However, the official response to this alarming trend has been mostly silence in order to make it so the virus is not as serious as it appears.

Last week, the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) began to reinstate its mask mandate in schools. This occurred one month after a city-wide order calling for indoor masking was rescinded, reducing the requirement for masks to a “strong recommendation.”

In addition, the city eliminated its tiered COVID response system. For the week of May 15–21, 592 new cases were reported, representing a gradual increase in numbers from week to week despite low testing numbers. Over 16,100 cases of COVID-19 have been reported since the beginning of the year.

The SDP introduced a “Mask to Stay” option on May 13 where students exposed to COVID-19 but not showing any symptoms would be permitted to remain in school if they wore a mask 10 days following exposure and are self-monitored. Otherwise, the student would have to quarantine for 10 days.

“Requiring students who have been exposed to COVID-19 but are not exhibiting any symptoms to quarantine at home has the unintended consequence of reducing in-school learning,” lamented the SDP.

In **Maryland**, Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS) reported 1,121 cases from May 19 through May 28, including 78 cases at Francis Scott Key Elementary/Middle School. The quarantine and isolation period is five days, reduced from 10 days on January 18. Masks have been optional in the BCPS system since March 14.

Washington D.C. region, COVID-19 cases have risen exponentially. In the week ending May 26, the District of Columbia reported 11,934 cases in a “school setting.”

The *Washington Post* week wrote last week, “4,698 D.C. Public Schools students had been identified as a close contact of someone who tested positive within the last 10 days.” But far from taking a public health-conscious approach such as returning to remote learning, “Students who are vaccinated, or contracted the virus in the last 90 days, are not required to quarantine.”

In early May the *Post* reported that the Democratic Party-led D.C. government had stopped giving its daily case numbers to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) because “it was time to treat coronavirus less like an emergency and more like an endemic illness.” On April 27, the “sporadic but fairly frequent” reports stopped altogether. Nearly two weeks went by before the city again reported case numbers, with no explanations given for the lapse.

The mask mandate for DCPS was dropped effective March 16. Public schools may choose to utilize the CDC’s “Test to Stay” program, designed to allow people who would otherwise go into quarantine to remain in school, with a negative COVID test and no symptoms. Quarantine period: 0 days for vaccinated people if no symptoms; 7 to 10 days for unvaccinated “close contacts.”

“It reflects the difficult reality for schools more than two years into the pandemic: Covid is still here, even as they seek a return to normalcy,” the *Post* declared.

The situation is little better in the District’s near suburbs. In Montgomery County, Maryland, the richest

and most populous county in the state, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) reported 2,034 cases in the last 10 days as of May 28.

The Montgomery County Board of Education voted to make indoor masking optional during a March 8 business meeting, in line with new Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines that no longer recommend universal mask-wearing.

The county, which earlier in the pandemic rejected Maryland's Republican Governor Larry Hogan's effort to return to in-person learning when cases were roughly 1,000 a day, has initiated a ridiculous campaign, "On or Off, It's Just Me." The program, which combines anti-scientific public health advice with the most selfish forms of individualism, purports to be a "reminder that wearing masks may be an individual choice and we must respect each other's choices."

Written in the framework of an individual's "personal space," the guideline completely ignores the well-being of MCPS's immunocompromised children and their families. The isolation and quarantine period for students was reduced to five days from 10 on March 1.

In nearby Prince George's County, 479 separate incidents of COVID-19 were reported between May 18 and 24. Although the county's indoor mask mandate was lifted on February 28, PGCPSS continues to require the use of masks in schools regardless of vaccination status, and claims that schools are cleaned and filtrated daily. Isolation/quarantine is five days, or 10 if the student is unable to wear a form-fitting mask correctly.

A teacher in Anne Arundel County, Maryland, near the state capital Annapolis, told the *World Socialist Web Site* that the promises school boards have made in order to lure educators and students back to school were "frankly, a lie."

"They never improved the ventilation system. There are still many classrooms that are hot during the summer and cold during the winter." According to the teacher, who wished to remain anonymous for fear of victimization, ventilation improvements were limited to the replacement of air conditioning filters.

Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) reported 298 active cases on May 28 and over 15,000 in total since the beginning of the school year last September 8; an active case is defined by an individual who tested positive that is "still under isolation. That

period is 5 days for students and adults."

New COVID mitigation "strategies" were put into place on May 23, in which students and staff of any school with a 5 percent positivity rate over a 14-day period would be "asked, not mandated" to wear masks for 10 days.

"Whatever the philosophical disagreements on masking and other issues this school year, there is almost universal agreement on one thing: We should do everything we can to keep students in classrooms, where we know the best instruction and learning takes place," said school superintendent George Arlotto.

The aversion toward public health measures is strongest in Republican Party-controlled **Virginia**, where Republican Governor Glenn Youngkin imposed a ban on mask mandates in February. Over 8,000 cases have been reported in Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) since the beginning of May, an exponential jump from its previous highs, including over 800 reported cases on both May 16 and May 23.

FCPS made mask-wearing in schools optional effective March 1, as long as community transmission was "low" or "medium" under the new CDC community risk guidelines as explained earlier. FCPS no longer contact traces individual cases.

Even with these alarming increases in cases, the school districts have done little to stem the rising tide, and in some cases intentionally make matters worse, in order to keep the region's economy open. "With COVID-19, American society has even come to accept the deaths of children from a preventable cause," states an Associated Press article ("COVID-19, shootings: Is mass death now tolerated in America?").

The article cites pediatrician Dr. Mark W. Kline, declaring "there was a time in pediatrics when 'children were not supposed to die.' There was no acceptable pediatric body count. ... At least, not before the first pandemic of the social media age, COVID-19, changed everything."



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