

# New Zealand hospitals inundated, healthcare system “imploding”

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Every day brings new reports of the worsening crisis in New Zealand’s public hospitals, as a result of the Labour Party-led government adopting the criminal COVID-19 policy of mass infection.

The government has dropped any pretence of even trying to mitigate the pandemic, after abandoning its zero COVID policy last October. It has ditched vaccine mandates, loosened isolation requirements and made masks optional in schools. During her recent visit to the US, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern referred to the pandemic as a thing of the past, as she encouraged tourists to return to New Zealand.

More than 1.2 million people have been infected with the virus, more than one fifth of the population, according to official figures. The actual number is undoubtedly far higher. As of June 10, the ministry of health had recorded 1,303 COVID-related deaths, 95 percent of which occurred this year, after the reopening of nonessential businesses and schools as Omicron hit the country.

On June 8, the *Otago Daily Times* reported that the Southern District Health Board (DHB) cancelled all surgeries at Dunedin Hospital “due to severe staff shortages.” Chief operating officer Hamish Brown blamed “high numbers of emergency department presentations, Covid-19, staff fatigue and illness.”

This situation is repeated across the country. At some DHBs, more than 20 percent of staff are sick with COVID or influenza or are isolating as a COVID contact. Meanwhile, St John Ambulance told the media this week that the number of call-outs now exceeds that during the Omicron surge in March–April. The service issued an emergency call for volunteers.

Emergency doctor John Bonning told the *New Zealand Herald* that Middlemore Hospital in South Auckland experienced its “biggest day ever” on June 7.

The emergency department saw 420 patients in one night, well above the normal level of 300. The following day, according to a leaked email sent by management to staff, there were still “71 patients awaiting a bed.”

A Middlemore worker quoted by *Stuff* said: “It is frightening, actually, working there at the moment. It feels like there are lives at risk because of the high volumes [of patients]... Staff are feeling enormous pressure—they’re stressed and tired.”

This week, 256 staff in eight wards at Wellington Hospital lodged a “provisional improvement notice” with management and the government regulator WorkSafe, citing unsafe staffing levels. In response, non-critical surgeries have been postponed.

On June 7, the *Herald* reported that a woman who presented to Wellington’s emergency department “waited a total of 25 hours for a bed on a ward to be available for her.” The woman, who has a chronic pain condition, said she “wasn’t treated like a human being.”

Hospitals are now seeing people who have been infected more than once. Whangarei emergency doctor Gary Payinda tweeted on June 8: “The last thing anyone needs is flu and a repeat case of Covid... I’m seeing cases within 6–12 weeks of their first infection, sometimes worse than their first one, in the emergency department.”

Health Minister Andrew Little has repeatedly downplayed these reports. On June 8, he misleadingly told *NewstalkZB* that “whereas so many other hospital systems... in the last couple of years were overrun and overwhelmed because of COVID, we managed to avoid that.” He neglected to add that this has changed dramatically in recent months. Now that NZ has adopted the same murderous “let it rip” policy as other

countries, its hospitals are facing the same crisis.

The Ardern government's efforts to downplay the pandemic have led to growing complacency and the belief, among some people, that getting COVID-19 is inevitable. Retail NZ CEO Greg Harford told *Newshub* yesterday that up to 40 percent of shoppers are no longer wearing masks, despite being technically required to do so.

Public health experts are increasingly concerned at the Labour government's refusal to take action. University of Canterbury senior lecturer Matthew Hobbs, and fellow researchers Alex Kazemi and Lukas Marek, wrote in the *Conversation* on June 1 that, in addition to COVID, flu cases have begun to spike, and "[c]onditions are also primed for potential outbreaks of other illnesses including measles, whooping cough and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)."

They called for "a recommitment to public health measures that slow the spread of respiratory infections, as well as a renewed drive for widespread vaccination." The experts pointed out that although 95 percent of the eligible population had received two shots of the Pfizer vaccine, far fewer are triple-vaccinated. According to the Ministry of Health, 2,665,867 people—about half the population—have received the third shot, which is essential to provide protection against Omicron, although it still does not prevent all illnesses and deaths.

In a June 10 *Conversation* article, epidemiologist Amanda Kvalsvig wrote that "the government's policy of keeping schools open through the Omicron outbreak has left communities exposed to widespread infection and disrupted learning." She called for the reintroduction of mask mandates and for proper ventilation and air quality monitoring systems in schools.

While reporting on the crisis in hospitals, as well as chronic teacher and student absences due to COVID, corporate media outlets continue to publish articles encouraging people to treat the pandemic as over.

*Stuff's* travel writer Brook Sabin declared following a recent visit to Australia: "Covid is going nowhere and the restriction-free life isn't as scary as it seems. More people need to head overseas and realise there is life after Covid." He did not mention that Australia is recording hundreds of COVID deaths every week due to its bipartisan "let it rip" policy.

One reader commented below the article: "As a doctor working in a hospital that has just cancelled elective surgery for two weeks as the hospital is overloaded from staff sickness and a long COVID tail and now influenza, I find your article plain irresponsible and selfish [...] the health system in Aotearoa is imploding." The comment received more than 90 positive reactions.

Another reader stated: "We should be still in full lock down. Not long ago 20-30 deaths a day would have been horrifying.... If the world locked down properly the virus would have been gone in 4 weeks."

Wellington resident Erica observed on Twitter: "We're averaging 11 deaths per day. If the road toll for Easter was nearly 50 there'd be an outcry. I am a support worker and in our service, after being covid-free, this week 8/12 [8 out of 12] residents have it. Three staff are also infected. This is our peak."

There is significant opposition to the homicidal policy of mass infection, which finds no expression in parliament or the trade unions, which enforced the government's reopening agenda. This raises the need for working people to take their own action by building independent, rank-and-file safety committees in schools, hospitals and other workplaces. These must fight for the immediate closure of schools and nonessential businesses, and for a fully-resourced elimination strategy, which has proven successful in New Zealand, China and other parts of the world, to stamp out the virus and end the pandemic.



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