

COVID infections skyrocket again in New York City

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New York City and its surrounding region have seen a massive increase in the official number of people infected with COVID-19 in the last month. The city is recording a daily average of nearly 5,000 cases. On July 14, 1,182 people were hospitalized from the disease. The test positivity rate is over 15 percent for the city. Over-the-counter rapid antigen tests, which may now comprise most tests, are not counted in this figure, and it is likely that the number of those infected is much higher.

According to media reports, cases citywide have increased 33 percent in the last week, and 45 percent in the borough of Staten Island alone. The number of people hospitalized has increased 28 percent. The daily average of deaths from COVID-19 is 11 people.

Fifty-seven percent of the tests sequenced indicate infection from the highly infectious BA.5 subvariant of the Omicron variant of the virus.

The increase in sickness—and the deaths and the persistent Long-COVID disabilities that come with it—is no surprise. The systematic ending of COVID mitigations and COVID tracking and testing in the city by Democratic Mayor Eric Adams and New York state Democratic Governor Kathy Hochul has fueled the current wave of infection. Scientists and members of the public, particularly those who work in crowded workplaces and follow the progress of the disease closely, such as educators, have predicted the inevitable climb in cases.

The Frost Valley YMCA summer camp in Claryville, New York in the Catskill mountains, popular with youth from New York City, closed early last week because of COVID infections. Staff at one nursing home in the Hudson Valley just north of the city told the WSW, anonymously, that the disease was spreading rapidly among staff and residents despite mandatory testing of visitors. No doubt this is the tip of the iceberg for elders in the area who remain one of the populations most vulnerable to the disease.

One high school teacher, who wished to remain anonymous for fear of retribution by the city's Department of Education, told the WSW: "More and more New

Yorkers are following the lead of our reckless mayor and other politicians, going maskless and dropping all mitigations, even as BA.5 spreads and BA.2.75 waits in the wings for the fall. I fear for what will happen with BA.2.75 in fall and early winter now that most New Yorkers no longer take COVID seriously. I am gravely concerned this coming fall/winter will make last winter's Omicron surge of disease in NYC schools look minuscule in comparison."

Last week, the city's Health Department tweeted, "To help slow the spread, all New Yorkers should wear a high-quality mask, such as an N95, KN95 or KF94 in all public indoor settings and around crowds outside." But this is little more than a pro forma gesture. There are no mandates from the city or the state. The requirement to wear masks on public transportation is not enforced and observers have noted that the yellow masking signs on subways and buses have begun to disappear. The months-long propaganda by the capitalist media to convince the public that the pandemic is over has encouraged millions to unmask indoors and in crowded areas.

Early this month, the Adams administration eliminated the city's color-coded COVID warning system. The web page where it appeared now reads, "We are re-evaluating the city's Covid Alert system. Check back here for updates in the coming weeks." The page adds, "There are currently high transmission levels of COVID-19 throughout the city, so you should continue to take the following precautions." It has apparently not been updated since at last July 1, although the city continues to publish COVID data.

In response to questions about his abolition of the warning system, Adams told a press conference last week, "The color-coded system was fighting an old war. And as COVID shifted, it became a new war," he said. "So we're not going to hold onto something that's an old weapon merely because we had it. No, we're going to create new weapons to fight this new war." He added that the city's COVID statistics were "at a good, stable place."

Just as ominously, according to a special report in *Gothamist*, the city has begun to close city-run COVID

testing centers. The news site noted that according to its analysis of publicly available data, “Hospital testing sites were cut in half citywide from mid-February to mid-April—from 270 sites to 144 locations—leading to fewer hours of testing availability. This shrunken landscape includes both brick-and-mortar clinics as well as mobile testing vans.”

In January, as the first wave of the Omicron variant spiked, some media websites also noted that testing centers had been shut down. Despite public outrage at the time, it is now clear that the closures continued immediately after the last surge began to subside.

Officials from the Adams administration have responded to the news of the closing by saying that they have increased availability of the less reliable at-home testing kits.

In a grotesque display of cynicism and hypocrisy, former Mayor Bill De Blasio, who gutted COVID protections and opened schools as panic raged in the city, criticized the COVID policy of his successor Adams. “A proper response from our federal and city government starts and ends with clarity from our institutions,” the ex-mayor, now running for the Democratic nomination for the 10th Congressional District, told a press conference on Thursday.

This is the former mayor who, in lockstep with the Biden administration, eliminated social distancing in schools and claimed that schools were the “safest places in the city,” a lie made possible only because of his administration’s systematic and deliberate undertesting of students and staff.

This is not all. Hypocrisy and mealy-mouthed deception are in good supply from the authorities in New York. Governor Hochul announced earlier this week that she would seek an outside investigation of the state’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic, saying, “I wanted to know a complete picture of what happened during the pandemic, the good, the bad, the ugly. This is not just a report to point fingers at what went wrong. I need to create the action plan going forward.”

In relation to the current wave of the pandemic, which had infected 9,253 people and killed 47 on July 13, Hochul announced, “We’re not looking at more restrictions right now because this time around,” adding, “This is going to be more endemic. People are getting used to living with it.”

But, unsurprisingly, pride of place for deception and hypocrisy goes to the *New York Times*. In an article on the reaction of New York’s population to the current wave of infection, “As Sixth Covid Wave Hits, Many New Yorkers Shrug It Off,” the *Times* sought blame the population of New York itself for supposed indifference to the new wave of the pandemic.

“Across the city, many New Yorkers—from the unvaccinated to the boosted—said that neither BA.5’s

prevalence nor its worrisome attributes—including its ability to override immunity from past infections and vaccines—had them dramatically rethinking risk,” the newspaper reported.

The article goes on to suggest that this “rethinking” is motivated by the Adams administration and there remain real risks to COVID, including Long COVID and cardiovascular disease. It then quotes a complacent physician, Dr. Bruce Farber, the chief of infectious diseases at Northwell Health, the largest private health care business in New York state.

“I think we all know that the public is not interested in masking,” Dr. Farber said. “They’re not terribly interested in boosters. They’re not terribly interested in vaccinating their children. That’s very disappointing to somebody in public health, and I think it’s somewhat foolish, but nevertheless, it’s a fact of life. And so you just deal.”

“Just deal” has been the unofficial COVID slogan of the *New York Times* since April 2020 when it began to urge “a return to normal” in scores of articles and opinion pieces that downplayed the effects of the virus from Thomas Friedman’s notorious call for mass infection in May 2020 to the *Times*’ incessant demands that schools open. In its coverage of New York City, in fact, the *Times* developed a cadre of education misinformation specialists, such as Eliza Shapiro, who sought to promote the need of students to return to infectious school buildings as soon as possible and regardless of the consequences.

The latest wave can be stopped, and the pandemic can be stopped, but by the collective action of the working class in pursuit of the elimination of COVID-19 on a global scale. The WWSWS has outlined an effective program of action in this video: “What must be done to end the pandemic.”



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