

Biden tests positive again after completing Paxlovid course: The dangers of the “forever COVID” policy

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Late Saturday morning, Dr. Kevin C. O'Connor, physician to the President, sent a memorandum to White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre informing her that President Joe Biden had tested positive for COVID again after his negative test on Tuesday evening after completing the Pfizer anti-viral medication Paxlovid.

He wrote, “After testing negative on Tuesday evening, Wednesday morning, Thursday morning, and Friday morning, the President tested positive late Saturday morning, by antigen testing. This, in fact, represents ‘rebound’ positivity.” He added, “The President has experienced no reemergence of symptoms and continues to feel quite well. This being the case, there is no reason to reinstate treatment at this time, but we will obviously continue close observation. However, given his positive antigen test, he will reinstate strict isolation procedures.”

Following the official announcement of Biden’s positive COVID test and the cancellation of his planned travel to Michigan and Delaware, Biden proceeded to minimize the significance of these developments by tweeting, “Folks, today I tested positive for COVID again. This happens with a small minority of folks. I’ve got no symptoms, but I’m going to isolate for the safety of everyone around me. I’m still at work and will be back on the road soon.”

Biden is not the only high-level figure in Washington laid low by COVID-19. West Virginia Senator Joe Manchin, the decisive 50th vote in the Senate on most issues, including Biden’s latest environment and energy legislation, and Senate Majority Whip Richard Durbin were also isolating with the infection. Others infected in July were Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, along with Democratic senators Tina Smith, Richard Blumenthal and Tom Carper, Republican senators Lisa Murkowski and Ben Sasse, and eight members of the House of Representatives.

The turn of events is a setback for the White House, which had hoped to bank on the president’s illness and quick recovery to assure Americans that coronavirus was now a walk in the park, given the use of the current vaccines and anti-viral therapeutics. Biden’s testing positive for COVID again coincides with Dr. Anthony Fauci’s similar rebound in late June, which has many questioning the complication’s rarity.

There is a clear sense of damage control behind the administration’s health advisers efforts to downplay the “rebound.” The corporate media cooperated, barely mentioning in the Sunday interview programs that the 79-year-old US president had come down with a second infection from a disease whose most lethal effects have been on his age group.

Nor was anyone so rude as to suggest that having the 81-year-old Nancy Pelosi, second in line of succession to the presidency, traveling to a potential war zone around Taiwan at this time was a reckless endeavor.

Biden left isolation on Wednesday and triumphantly removed his mask before the media and cameras at a staged Rose Garden rally to celebrate his negative test. He boastfully declared his symptoms had always been mild, and his quick recovery was evidence of his administration’s progress in bringing the pandemic to heel. After giving thanks to God for his swift recovery, he said, “The entire time I was in isolation, I was able to work, to carry out the duties of the office without any interruption. It’s a real statement on where we are in the fight against COVID-19.”

Since declaring his personal victory against the coronavirus, Biden has been recklessly attending public events unmasked, contrary to even the dubious and reckless guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which recommends that after five full days after testing positive and without any fevers for at least 24 hours, isolation can be ended, but that a “well-fitting mask must be worn for ten full days any time you are around others inside your home or in public. Do not go to places where you are unable to wear a mask.” The CDC specifically wrote, “If your test is negative, you can end isolation, but continue to wear a well-fitting mask around others at home and in public until day ten.”

Jean-Pierre, when asked why Biden had violated CDC guidelines, particularly when he addressed CEOs during a Thursday meeting at the White House complex, side-stepped the issue by saying, “They were socially distanced. They were far enough apart. So, we made it safe for them to be together, to be on that stage.” Clearly, she didn’t receive the memo that COVID is an airborne pathogen.

White House officials are, however, conducting extensive contact tracing, which has been essentially abandoned by all public health officials and directly conflicts with the precept being put forward by the White House that every American will get COVID and that the pandemic will be with humanity forever. Apparently, top US government officials deserve greater protection from an infected president than school teachers from children who bring COVID into the classroom.

As for workers in offices, factories, warehouses and other workplaces, Biden’s smug declaration that he was able to work throughout his infection is clearly aimed at setting an example. Stay on the job no matter how sick you are or how many people you may infect!

It is worth recalling that the CDC had halved its isolation guidance back in December 2021 not based on any science but at the behest of Delta Airlines CEO Ed Bastian to decrease the isolation period to five days “to address the potential impact of the current isolation policy” on their bottom dollar. CDC Director Rochelle Walensky noted at the time that her decision to change guidelines were made to “keep the critical functions of society open and operating.” She added, “We can’t take science in a vacuum. We have to put science in the context of how it can be implemented in a functional society.”

In a study published in a preprint in March 2022, Harvard and Massachusetts General Hospital found no difference in viral kinetics [length of time someone remains infective] between people infected with Delta or Omicron with non-severe symptoms regardless of vaccine status. The authors wrote, “Over 50 percent of individuals had a replication-competent, culturable virus at day five, and 25 percent had a culturable virus at day eight.”

Dr. Amy Barczak, an infectious disease specialist at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston and co-author of the study, told *Nature* in May, “The facts of how long people are infectious for have not really changed. There is no data to support five days or anything shorter than ten days of isolation.” A recent study from the UK appears to corroborate the Harvard study’s concerns over reduced isolation times, meaning that current public health guidance is assisting in keeping the coronavirus around forever.

Others, like infectious disease specialist Dr. Yonatan Grad of Harvard’s T.H. Chan School of Public Health, cautioned that some might remain infectious beyond the 10-day window. He told *Nature* that the phenomenon might be linked with those taking the two-drug combination nirmatrelvir and ritonavir, known under the brand name Paxlovid.

He added, “There’s a rebound phenomenon where people will see that their symptoms seem to resolve, and they may even test negative on a rapid test, but then a few days later symptoms and the virus come back.” In such instances, such people may continue infecting and be unaware of it.

The CDC issued on May 24, 2022, a health advisory stating that “COVID-19 rebound has been reported to occur between two to eight days after initial recovery and is characterized by a recurrence of COVID-19 symptoms or a new positive viral test after having tested negative.” They advised that additional Paxlovid is not required but that such people should re-isolate for at least five days.

On Sunday, the *New York Times*, writing on the President’s rebound, referred to a study in a preprint published in June that reviewed the electronic health records of 13,644 people and found that rebound affected a little more than 5 to 6 percent within 30 days. However, the data set predates the much more contagious and immune-evading BA.5 subvariant that has recently become dominant, and rates of reinfection within 90 days are higher than ever. Dr. Eric Topol critiqued the study as being “way off the mark” and argued that the only valid study trial would require a prospective approach where participants are frequently tested.

Dr. Jonathan Reiner, professor of medicine and surgery at George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Sciences, tweeted on Saturday on the White House’s disclosure, “I think this was predictable. The prior data suggesting ‘rebound’ Paxlovid positivity in the low single digits is outdated and with BA.5 is likely 20 to 40 percent or even higher.”

Data from the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) indicates that more than 3 million courses of Paxlovid have been

administered across the US, and nearly 5.7 million have been ordered at a current rate of 40,000 prescriptions per day. Placing this figure into scale, the *Atlantic* recently compared this to the rate of daily oxycodone usage.

Not being mentioned in the media is the financial bonanza the pandemic has been for the drug companies that managed to edge out their competitors in the burgeoning field of vaccine development. Pfizer recently reported its single largest quarterly sales in its history, bringing in \$27.7 billion in revenues, of which \$8.8 billion came from their COVID-19 vaccines and \$8.1 billion from Paxlovid, beating Wall Street’s estimates. Meanwhile, it is competing with Moderna to ensure it gets its BA.4/BA.5-specific vaccines into US markets by the fall of this year.

The need to develop new generations of vaccines is a direct result of the policies that have allowed the coronavirus ample opportunities to mutate by having unimpeded access to the population. And what vaccine manufacturers have not been able to accomplish thus far is to develop products faster than the virus develops significant mutations. To say nothing of the inability of global capitalism to deliver vaccines of any kind to the world’s population more quickly than virus variants can reach vulnerable unvaccinated people in the poor countries.

Given the vast number of mutations permitted by the “COVID forever” policy, natural selection will produce not only more vaccine-evading variants of the coronavirus, but variants that can resist antivirals like Paxlovid. Dr. Derek Lowe, a Ph.D. in organic chemistry from Duke with experience in the pharmaceutical industry on drug discovery projects, wrote in *Science*, “Pfizer’s coronavirus protease inhibitor Paxlovid is being widely used now, and it’s been clear since the beginning that resistant strains of the virus could appear against it. After all, that’s what viruses do. With their vast numbers, fast generation time, and number of mutations, resistance to a given small molecule is generally just a matter of ‘when’, not ‘if.’”

And with millions of people becoming infected daily across the globe, the playing field is rigged in favor of the virus. A June 29, 2022, report in *Science* indicated that researchers conducting genomic sequencing had found mutations in variants circulating in infected people that can resist Paxlovid.

Conceivably, the idea of living with COVID forever also means that the vaccines and therapeutics that keep the virus at bay may soon run their course and exhaust themselves. Such a situation can be compounded by the development of multiple virulent forms of the Omicron subvariants that can co-exist and circulate simultaneously without competing with each other, as was seen early in the pandemic with Alpha, Beta and Gamma variants. This means people may find they are infected with two or more sub-variants at the same time.

The essential lesson of “forever COVID” and the façade that is unraveling in the White House should alert the working class to the immense dangers posed by the pandemic and the demands placed on them by Wall Street that it is safe to return to work and become infected. In yet unforeseen ways, the policy of forever COVID can make the last two years seem child’s play by comparison.



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