

As COVID-19 spread deepens, Arkansas reports a dozen cases of monkeypox

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The Arkansas Department of Health (ADH) reported last Thursday that the state has recorded 12 cases of monkeypox. Just a month prior, the state reported its first case of the disease. Notwithstanding the Biden administration's belated declaration of a state of emergency over the spread of the monkeypox virus, workers throughout the world have voiced their deep concern over existing conditions in which two pandemics are being allowed to rip through the population.

While the far-right have issued baseless claims that monkeypox is a "gay disease," according to a July 28 statement released by the ADH, "Monkeypox is spread through close contact and *can be transmitted to anyone regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity.*" (Emphasis added.)

The ADH goes on to report, "It can be spread by direct skin-to-skin contact with infectious rash, scabs, or body fluids. This can include household and/or intimate contact. Spreading can also occur when contacting contaminated items, such as clothing. It can also be transmitted through respiratory secretions during prolonged, face-to-face contact; however, it is not an airborne illness. Monkeypox is not spread through casual, brief conversations or walking by someone with monkeypox, like at a grocery store."

These claims are unsubstantiated and at odds with decades of research and reports on monkeypox, which have warned that the virus can spread through aerosols, in addition to direct skin-to-skin contact.

Arkansas Republican Governor Asa Hutchinson has not issued a statement on the increase in monkeypox cases. As of this writing, 30,189 people globally have contracted the virus, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The US accounts for nearly 30 percent of all cases, numbering 8,933, while four countries in Europe have tallied more than 15,000. In conjunction with the unbridled spread of the monkeypox virus, official COVID-19 cases have reached 589,896,455 internationally, according to the worldometers website, with an official record of 6,438,021 deaths, though estimates of excess deaths place the actual global death toll above 20 million.

ADH Director Dr. Jennifer Dillaha said July 5, "Arkansas has been monitoring cases of monkeypox in the U.S. While this news is concerning, monkeypox is not as contagious as other viruses, like COVID-19. We encourage anyone who feels they may have been exposed to monkeypox to please contact their health care provider and be tested." Despite the claim monkeypox is not as infectious as COVID-19, the state government has done virtually nothing to prevent its spread. They have refused to reinstate mask mandates, while pressing ahead with the full reopening of schools this fall, where both COVID and monkeypox will spread widely in the coming months.

Over the course of the monkeypox outbreak, coronavirus cases in Arkansas have soared. On Thursday, official cases increased by 1,438, while in the last week ADH reported 8,064 new cases, bringing the case count to more than 911,000. This is more than 30 percent of the state's population! According to health officials, the latest figures show, as of Thursday, more than half of Arkansans are fully immunized, numbering 1,652,249, with another 287,907 partially immunized. But the inoculated populace is not safe, due to waning immunity and the increased dangers of the Omicron BA.5 and future variants.

In the race for Arkansas governor, Republican former White House Adviser Sarah Huckabee Sanders and Democrat Chris Jones have both refused to address COVID-19 or monkeypox. Exposing all the myths that the Democratic Party represents the working class, Jones' campaign website has said nothing about monkeypox since the first case was reported in Arkansas late last month, as well as COVID-19, despite its soaring rate of infection.

Jones, as have the Democrats as a whole, has pushed for further armaments in Ukraine and supported Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, bringing the world to the brink of World War III. If he were to win, which is highly unlikely, he would do nothing to address the coronavirus and monkeypox pandemics.

Workers throughout Arkansas have taken the brunt of the criminal policies of mass infection, as well as savage attacks

on their wages and working conditions. Tyson Foods, the poultry titan, whose headquarters are in Springdale, Arkansas, has reported record profits in its first and second quarters. Operating income more than doubled from \$705 million for the first quarter of 2021 to \$1.45 billion in 2022, while sales for the quarter were \$12.93 billion, up more than \$2 billion from \$10.46 billion in 2021. According to ZipRecruiter, 21 percent of employees earn between \$21,000 to \$26,499 per year, followed by 24 percent of the workforce earning between \$26,500 and \$31,999 annually. Tyson has refused to implement any stringent measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, let alone monkeypox.

Moreover, Walmart recently laid off 200 workers from its corporate office in Bentonville, Arkansas. This comes at a time when the company is “modernizing” its stores, i.e., installing security cameras in its food and baby formula aisles amidst a mass shortage of both worldwide, brought on by the US-NATO-backed proxy-war in Ukraine against Russia and the coronavirus pandemic. This repressive expansion of surveillance coincides with the mass removal of cashiers through the introduction of “self-checkout” stations. The layoffs come after Walmart heir Steuart Walton (net worth \$300 million) purchased Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen’s antique aircraft collection, with one craft, the B-17 Flying Fortress, having an estimated value of over \$9,000,000.

The crisis in public education in Arkansas is also steadily deepening, with schools reopening across the state amid the spread of COVID and monkeypox. In July, Arkansas lawmakers rescinded the authority given to the state to distribute nearly \$460 million in remaining federal COVID-19 relief funds to school districts, demanding that the funds be used by the schools for teacher and staff bonuses. This comes as more than half of all teachers in the US are considering leaving the profession, largely due to the disastrous conditions during the pandemic, according to a survey conducted in late January by GBAO Strategies on behalf of the National Education Association (NEA).

State Democrats have postured as being opposed to this attack on teachers, claiming it was an effort to avoid the consideration of raising their salaries, despite the state’s sitting on a \$1.6 billion surplus. Hutchinson also criticized the decision, saying the state legislature had no authority to rescind the decision. However, no maneuvers were taken by either the Democrats or Hutchinson to reverse or rally mass opposition to the decision.

The Legislative Council voted to rescind the call for appropriation for the federal funds and recommended schools use the remaining COVID-19 relief fund for bonuses. According to the Council, the districts’ plans for spending the reallocated relief funds must go before a

legislative panel, which recommended that districts use the funds to provide a pitiful one-time \$5,000 bonus for educators and \$2,500 to staff. Moreover, Republican Senate President Jimmy Hickey said myriad districts were unaware the funds could be used for bonuses, saying, “Obviously now there’s not going to be any question that it can be done.”

Earlier this year, Hutchinson failed to put teachers’ raises on the agenda for a special session, citing an expected lack of support among his Republican cohorts. Republican legislative leaders said the special session was an inappropriate time to raise the issue of teacher salaries since the legislature failed to complete its annual review of education funding, as required by law.

“I am concerned that teachers in some districts will get a bonus, but others may not,” Hutchinson said, justifying that no one should receive a pay increase. Arkansas has raised teacher salaries over the past several years, and the minimum teacher salary for the coming school year is \$36,000. Proponents of the pay raise have noted that base salaries in most of the states adjoining Arkansas are higher.

Amid an unprecedented global heatwave, simultaneous pandemics spiraling out of control, an assault on democratic rights by a thoroughly reactionary Supreme Court, the gutting of social programs, imperialist provocations which carry the threat of nuclear war, paltry wages and ramped up exploitation, workers in Arkansas and internationally are confronted with a hydra of social and economic turmoil. The question is presented: socialism or barbarism?

The Socialist Equality Party is fighting to resolve the crisis of leadership in the working class and build a socialist movement to put an end to capitalist barbarism. All workers in Arkansas should read and study our program and get involved in the fight for a socialist future.



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