

New COVID wave in New Zealand

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COVID-19 cases, deaths and hospitalisations are continuing to increase sharply in New Zealand. A third Omicron wave is spreading unimpeded as a result of the Labour Party-led government removing all public health measures.

Yesterday the Ministry of Health reported 3,168 new cases, up from 2,430 on the same day last week—a 30 percent increase. This included 379 new reinfections, 12 percent of the total. There were 272 people in hospital with COVID, up from 203 a week earlier.

The official figures underestimate the actual spread. Messages encouraging people to get tested if they have symptoms have largely disappeared, as part of the government's efforts to encourage maximum complacency about the deadly coronavirus.

Last week 41 new deaths were reported among people who had COVID—up from 34 deaths the previous week. They included one child aged between 10 and 19, one person in their 30s, two in their 40s, one in their 50s, five in their 60s and 31 over the age of 70.

The ministry of health has linked 2,095 deaths to COVID since the pandemic began—nearly all of which occurred this year following the Ardern government's adoption of the criminal policy of mass infection.

The real death toll is certainly higher. The ministry records that 1,075 more people died within 28 days of contracting COVID; it asserts that 695 of these deaths were not COVID-related and 380 were from unknown causes. These claims should be treated with scepticism: only last week the ministry admitted that it vastly undercounted COVID hospitalisations in recent months.

Highly infectious Omicron sub-variants have been identified in New Zealand, including BQ.1.1 and the XBB variant, which is widely described as a “nightmare variant” that can evade antibodies generated by previous infections and possibly vaccinations. In Singapore, which has a similar sized

population to New Zealand, XBB is fuelling around 40,000 to 50,000 reported cases per week, compared with 16,000 last week in NZ.

There are growing warnings about the looming wave of Long COVID. So far, more than 1.8 million total infections have been recorded, out of a population of 5 million people, suggesting hundreds of thousands of people will develop long-term health problems.

This week, the health ministry's official “Unite against COVID-19” Twitter page published a short video statement by Auckland University virologist Dr Natalie Netzler, who said: “A lot of people aren't aware that every time you catch a COVID infection, your risk of having other severe issues start to rise.”

Netzler explained that “with reinfection, your chances of getting diabetes goes up almost double. Your chances of getting mental health issues like anxiety and depression goes up double, and there are even more risks, higher risks, for things like blood clots, or breathlessness, or chronic fatigue: your risks of those go up three times with reinfection compared to that first infection. So it's really important that we do everything we can to try and prevent ourselves getting sick, not just once, but many times with COVID.”

The statement is an indictment of the Labour government, which is doing “everything it can” to help the coronavirus spread. One Twitter user replied to Netzler's video by suggesting that the ministry “change their account name to ‘Act individually against COVID’, because ‘uniting’ and acting collectively are no longer @nzlabour policy. More truthful tweets would be like: ‘You're in grave danger, and you're on your own. Good luck.’”

Last October, acting on the orders of big business, the Ardern government abandoned its zero-COVID policy, which had kept New Zealand mostly free from the virus up to that point. This year, with the assistance of the trade unions, all businesses and schools reopened,

shutdowns were banned, and mask mandates and other protections were progressively dropped.

The sharp rise in COVID hospitalisations, as well as chronic understaffing, is fuelling a worsening crisis in public hospitals. Across Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Waikato, Health NZ has 112 full-time nursing vacancies in hospital emergency departments (EDs) alone.

Nationwide, nearly one in four people showing up to EDs have to wait more than six hours to be seen—up from one in 10 when the Labour Party-led government was first elected five years ago. In the MidCentral region and Capital and Coast region, 45.2 and 43.8 percent of patients wait longer than six hours.

The death of a 50-year-old woman in June has been linked to overcrowding at the Middlemore Hospital ED in Auckland. Two more deaths, at Christchurch Hospital and Wellington Hospital, are under investigation.

One of these was a four-year-old boy, Sebby Chua, who died last month from suspected complications after a strep throat infection. His parents told the media he was initially misdiagnosed and sent home from Kenepuru Hospital. Admitted to Wellington Hospital's ED a few days later, he had to wait more than three hours before a blood sample was taken.

After another four hours, during which time Sebby's parents say he received only pain medication, he died. His mother Abegail Chua told Newshub: "I really want to know why he wasn't assessed properly and why nothing was done within the first seven hours."

The crisis is just as severe in primary care. In New Plymouth, which has about 80,000 people, Radio NZ (RNZ) reports that not one of the city's 17 clinics is accepting new patient enrolments.

Christchurch general practitioner Angus Chambers told RNZ on October 25 that people there were also struggling to get appointments. The urgent care facility at his clinic sometimes has "wait times of four or five hours," he said. "We've never ever had that before, and it's extremely stressful for everybody really, patients and our staff."

In the latest sign of the growing anger among healthcare workers, some 4,200 primary healthcare nurses held a nationwide four-hour strike on October 27 in protest against an insulting below-inflation pay offer of 3 percent.

The biggest obstacle facing workers in healthcare, education and every other sector is the trade unions, which enforce the government's policy of mass infection and have for decades accepted stagnant wages, deteriorating levels of staffing and poor conditions.

The pandemic will continue to worsen in the months ahead and many more people will die, unless workers intervene with new organisations—rank-and-file safety committees, built and controlled by workers—to fight for a fully-funded elimination strategy, in every country. Lives must come before profits: the resources needed to stop COVID-19 and to rebuild the healthcare system should be taken from the banks and big business, which have profited from tens of billions of dollars in government bailouts and quantitative easing over the past two years.

We urge readers in New Zealand to attend the online public meeting on November 20, at 5 p.m. NZ time, organised by Australian healthcare workers' and educators' rank-and-file groups: "Unite educators and health workers: Oppose the ending of COVID protection measures! Lives before profit!" Register now: <https://bit.ly/3CRCuOh>.



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