Blood tests reveal at least two-thirds of Australians have contracted COVID-19

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Two serological surveys released on Thursday suggest that at least two-thirds of the Australian population, or 16.9 million people, have been infected at least once with COVID-19. It is estimated that one-fifth of all adults in the country contracted the virus between June and August.

For the first time, blood samples from children and teenagers were tested. The rate of COVID-19 infection among those aged under 20 was similar to the overall population, with 64 percent of samples testing positive, although the rate was slightly higher among school-aged children.

These results make clear that official infection figures are a vast understatement of the extent of the virus. Since the start of the pandemic, around 10.4 million cases have been reported across the country, an undercount of at least 6.5 million according to these surveys.

In fact, the true figure is likely higher still. Previous studies have established that nucleocapsid protein antibodies are not detectable in 15 to 20 percent of vaccinated people infected with Omicron. These antibodies are produced at lower levels and wane more quickly when an individual has received at least a partial course of COVID-19 vaccine.

Given Australia's high vaccination rate, at least for the initial two-dose course (96 percent), it is likely that more than 20 million people in the country have been infected.

Almost all of these infections have occurred in 2022. On December 31, 2021, the official total for Australia stood at 395,504.

The mass infection of the population with a highly contagious and deadly virus is the result of the deliberate and bipartisan adoption of "let it rip" policies by all Australian governments, state, territory and federal.

One of the sharpest expressions of the reopening drive was the herding of (then mostly unvaccinated) students and teachers back to face-to-face schooling in February, during what was, at the time, the worst surge of COVID-19 in Australia throughout the pandemic. This was motivated by the demands of big business for parents to go back to work, under conditions of staff shortages exacerbated by the pandemic.

This has resulted in the mass infection of children, who have in turn become a significant and unwitting vector, spreading the virus to their parents and older relatives, who are most at risk of severe illness or death.

Between June 8 and August 31, the Paediatric Active Enhanced Disease Surveillance (PAEDS) network collected samples from 2,046 children and teenagers who were undergoing procedures at eight hospitals across the country.

Nucleocapsid antibodies were detected in 64 percent of the paediatric survey participants. Among school-aged children and teenagers, the prevalence was slightly higher, at 70 percent for 12–19 year olds and 67 percent for 5–11 year olds.

Of those school-aged children who were unvaccinated, 75 percent were nucleocapsid positive, including 81 percent of teenagers.

Nucleocapsid antibodies were detected in 38 percent of young people under 20 with no history of past infection, pointing to the high incidence of asymptomatic infection and the lack of surveillance testing.

The surveys also tested for spike protein antibodies, which remain detectable in the blood for longer, but because these are also produced in response to the COVID-19 vaccines used in Australia, they are only a reliable marker of infection among the unvaccinated.

Spike antibodies were detected in 79 percent of children aged between one and four years old, all of whom are unvaccinated. Across the whole survey, 82 percent of unvaccinated children and youth had these antibodies in their blood.

Only 90 percent of those who had previously been infected tested positive for nucleocapsid antibodies, which is in line with the known limitations of these tests, especially among the vaccinated.

This suggests that the difference in infection rate between vaccinated and unvaccinated children is negligible. Therefore, the spike positive figures for the unvaccinated, showing that 94 percent of teenagers and 84 percent of 5–11 year olds have been infected with COVID-19, are likely closer to the true infection rate.

The Australian COVID-19 Sero-surveillance Network conducted its third survey of blood donated by adults, analysing 5,005 samples collected between August 23 and September 2.

Nucleocapsid antibodies were detected in 65 percent of samples, up from 46 percent when the survey was last conducted in June, and 17 percent in February. Extrapolating

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from these results, it is likely that at least half the adult population of Australia contracted COVID-19 over a period of six months.

The highest prevalence was found among 18–29 year-olds, with 79.7 percent of that cohort testing positive for nucleocapsid antibodies.

The study noted “these antibodies do not necessarily confer immunity,” especially from BA.4, BA.5 and other Omicron subvariants, which have “substantial immune escape, and re-infections are common.” It is not possible to determine from these results how many of the participants have had multiple cases of COVID-19.

The full implications of the mass infection and re-infection of the population, especially young people, with COVID-19 may not be known for decades. Some studies have shown that up to 30 percent of people infected with even a “mild” case will continue to experience symptoms of Long COVID for months and years afterward.

Even using the most conservative estimate, of a 5 percent incidence of Long COVID among highly vaccinated populations, these serological surveys would suggest that more than 1 million Australians are already suffering from the debilitating and poorly understood disease.

University of Queensland researchers recently discovered that COVID-19 can trigger an inflammatory response in immune cells in the brain, potentially leading to the development of Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s disease.

Figures from the Australia Bureau of Statistics show that deaths from dementia were 19.8 percent higher than historical averages in the first seven months of the year. Deaths from diabetes were 21.3 percent higher than average over the same period and 24 percent higher in July.

Overall, in the year to July, there were 16,375 excess deaths, 17.3 percent higher than average, including 2,503 in July. This compares to official COVID-19 death figures of 1,949 in July and 9,607 for the first seven months of the year.

These statistics reveal that, like the infection figures, the official COVID-19 death toll, now at 15,705, vastly understates the lethal consequences of the pandemic, in terms of additional illness and death caused by complications of infection, as well as the reduced capacity of an overwhelmed health system to deal with otherwise treatable conditions.

As COVID-19 infection and death have continued to mount, governments, the corporate media and the unions have promoted the dangerous lie that the pandemic is over and should be considered no more serious than the common cold.

Virtually all public health measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 have been torn down since late 2021. This includes border closures, quarantine, contact tracing, mass testing, capacity limits and mask mandates.

This offensive against public safety has continued and deepened since the election of the federal Labor government in May. In recent months, mandatory isolation and paid pandemic leave for those infected with COVID-19 have been eliminated, placing workers, especially casuals and others without sick leave entitlements, under enormous financial pressure to attend work while infectious, placing their coworkers at risk.

Public health policy is now being entirely dictated by the demands of the corporate elite. COVID-19 mitigation measures have been scrapped to ensure that nothing stands in the way of the continued operations and profits of big business.

In an attempt to cover over the catastrophic impact of these moves, the Albanese government and the Labor-dominated National Cabinet have reduced the reporting of COVID-19 statistics from daily to weekly.

Now, the two most populous states, New South Wales and Victoria, have ended mandatory reporting of positive rapid antigen tests, in an effort to further obfuscate the spread of the virus. Despite this, official infection figures in the two states are increasing, indicating that another wave of COVID-19 is developing.

The continued mass infection of the population cannot be allowed to continue. The pandemic can be eliminated, but it will take a fight by the global working class, directed at ending the capitalist subordination of human health and lives to the profit demands of the corporate and financial elite.

As part of the fight to build such a movement, the Health Workers Rank-and-File Committee (HWRFC) and the Committee for Public Education (CFPE) call on all workers, students and professional people to join an online public meeting on Sunday, November 20 at 3 p.m. (AEDT).

The meeting, titled, “Unite educators and health workers: Oppose the ending of COVID protection measures! Lives before profit!” will outline a political perspective, including the building of rank-and-file committees, to unify health workers, teachers and other sections of workers in the fight for decent wages, working conditions and the elimination of COVID-19. Register now: https://bit.ly/3CRCuOh

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