

New Zealand government suppressed COVID testing to keep infected people at work

Tom Peters

4 December 2022

Last week it was revealed that in late July New Zealand’s senior public health officials decided “it would not be appropriate to either recommend or require” asymptomatic people to test for COVID-19, even “if they are visiting a vulnerable person” or “have been in contact with someone [outside their household] who has tested positive for COVID-19.”

The officials acknowledged that identifying asymptomatic COVID cases “may have benefits in terms of reducing transmission” of the deadly virus. Despite this, they wrote that “any asymptomatic testing (outside of household contacts) could have several unintended consequences,” including “additional people being (temporarily) taken out of the available workforce” if they tested positive.

In other words, people with asymptomatic COVID should ideally remain ignorant of the fact so that they can continue working—and spreading COVID to others. Throughout the pandemic, asymptomatic and presymptomatic cases, including among children, have been a major source of transmission, with studies suggesting that roughly 40 percent of all cases show no symptoms.

The recommendation to keep testing down appeared in a policy advice document prepared by the ministry of health’s COVID-19 Protection Framework Assessment Committee, led by Dr Andrew Old. It was written at the height of New Zealand’s second wave of Omicron, when COVID-19 was the country’s leading cause of death and there were more weekly deaths per capita than in most parts of the world.

The advice was not made public at the time and was only released on November 30 by *Newsroom* journalist Marc Daalder following a request made under the Official Information Act. On Twitter, Daalder aptly compared the advice to former US president Donald

Trump’s infamous statement in June 2020: “If we stop testing right now, we’d have very few cases, if any.” The lack of systematic testing in the US contributed to the unchecked spread of COVID and more than a million deaths.

The document provides further evidence that New Zealand’s Labour Party-led government adopted criminal policies that it knew would increase COVID transmission, including among “vulnerable people.” How many elderly and immune-compromised people died because the government refused to encourage routine, widespread testing?

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern scrapped New Zealand’s zero COVID policy in October 2021, at a time when the country had experienced just 32 deaths. The government imposed the policy of mass infection that had already killed millions of people worldwide. Virtually all public health measures in New Zealand have since been overturned and the death toll has soared to around 2,500 people.

The reason these deaths were not prevented is made clear in the health ministry officials’ advice. Big business demanded lower testing, along with an end to temporary lockdowns and other public health measures because they reduced “the available workforce” and therefore the profits extracted from the working class.

Daalder’s release of the July document provoked furious responses on Twitter. “Way to show Mammon rules while also throwing the vulnerable under the bus,” wrote Alison. Another person said: “This is absolutely appalling and an awful scandal! So does #NewZealand now practise eugenics and genocide as government policy??!”

Niamh commented: “My grandmother is literally dying of a Covid-induced heart condition following her infection in June. @nzlabour this is so unbelievably

cruel and callous of a decision.”

New Zealand is now well into its third wave of the pandemic and the holiday season is likely to be especially dangerous. In the week ending November 27, another 58 people died within 28 days of a positive COVID test, and 328 people were in hospital at the end of the week.

As of December 4, the seven-day average of reported cases stood at 4,805—a sharp increase of 27.8 percent on the previous week. The real number of cases is likely far higher. Roughly 25 percent of known cases are reinfections, which increases the risks of a person developing debilitating Long Covid.

Despite the surge in cases and the mounting death toll, the government continues to insist that the pandemic is over.

In an interview with *Women’s Weekly* published on December 1, Ardern declared: “this will be the first Christmas and summer holiday in three years where we haven’t had COVID hanging over us.” Last summer, she said, “we had epidemiologists telling us the date they thought [Omicron] would arrive, and that just creates anxiety for people, so this will be the first in ages where I hope people feel that lift from it a bit.”

Surgeon Dr Kelvin Ward responded on Twitter: “What an obscene take. Total delusion. Tell that to the sick people, and the healthcare workers etc.” Hospitals throughout the country are overwhelmed with patients and are chronically understaffed, leading to extremely long wait times in emergency departments, which has been linked to a number of deaths.

Long COVID researcher Dr Anna Brooks commented: “How are we here? Denying the pandemic exists? Pretending that COVID-19 has somehow disappeared? What really bothers me is the vulnerable who have been fed this ‘political’ message that they no longer need to be concerned & now believe this as fact. This. Is. Not. OK.”

Epidemiologist Dr Amanda Kvalsvig wrote: “Today feels like NZ’s ‘Don’t Look Up’ pandemic moment. The political messaging unequivocally deviates from the facts. The consequences of ignoring the risk are already known: preventable chronic disease on a scale that NZ is totally unprepared to manage.”

The *Women’s Weekly* article, reprinted by the *New Zealand Herald*, did not contradict Ardern’s bare-faced lie. The corporate media shares the government’s right-

wing, profits-over-lives agenda. *Stuff* and the *NZ Herald* have also joined the international media campaign for China to ditch its zero COVID policy and allow the coronavirus to spread among its 1.4 billion people, which would mean millions of deaths.

The New Zealand ruling elite’s pandemic plan amounts to this: the repudiation of basic public health principles, leading to an endless cycle of infection and reinfection, thousands of deaths every year, mass disablement through Long Covid, and a fall in life expectancy—as has already happened in the US, Britain and elsewhere.

The working class cannot “live with” this homicidal agenda. It must act to end the pandemic and save lives. The Socialist Equality Group calls on workers to organise rank-and-file committees in hospitals, schools and other workplaces, independently of the corporatist trade unions which have enforced the “let it rip” policy.

Such committees will fight for a scientific, internationally-coordinated elimination strategy to stop all transmission of COVID-19. The necessary resources for this can be obtained from the banks and corporations that have made enormous profits during the pandemic. This requires a political fight to reorganise society on the basis of socialism, placing human lives ahead of the profit interests of the banks and big business.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact