

Australia faces holiday surge as COVID infections, hospitalisations grow

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While the Australian corporate media and political establishment present the pandemic as a thing of the past, COVID infections and hospitalisations are continuing to increase. With all safety measures having been overturned, governments have created the conditions for yet another surge of the virus over the Christmas holiday period.

The official figures are increasingly meaningless. In the final stage of ending all restrictions, governments at all levels have largely shut down the Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing system. They have also wound back access to the less reliable rapid antigen tests (RATs), in many cases ending subsidies and free provision of the tests. It is no longer mandatory to report positive RAT tests.

In early September, governments abolished daily reporting of COVID statistics. That decision, a transparent attempt to bury the pandemic, was made after the deadliest month of the coronavirus crisis, with 2,056 fatalities in August.

Concurrently with this suppression of information, the authorities ended the requirement for COVID-positive individuals to isolate from the community at the end of September. Coming hand-in-hand with the abolition of federal pandemic leave payments, this was essentially an edict for those infected with the virus to continue going to work, whatever the consequences.

In other words, the data provide only the most limited snapshot of the real circulation of COVID. But even still, recent figures point to a pronounced uptick.

For the weekly reporting period ending December 9, some 111,452 new COVID infections were recorded across the country. That is only the second time since daily reporting was ended, that the total has been above 100,000. The previous time that number was exceeded was the week before, ending December 2.

The weekly figure for December 9 compares with a low of 30,565 new infections reported in the seven days ending 21 October. On November 4, the figure was just over 40,000 and on November 11, a little over 60,000. That is, infections have doubled in roughly the space of a month.

The figures are particularly stark in the two most populous states, New South Wales (NSW) and Victoria, which throughout the pandemic have accounted for the largest share of Australia's infections and deaths.

In NSW, cases have grown from 10,031 in the week ending October 28 to 40,179 in the seven days to December 9. In Victoria, they have increased from 8,811 in the October 28 period to 27,705 in the week that ended yesterday. Sharp rises have also been recorded in other states, particularly South Australia.

Hospitalisations have grown in line with the increase in cases. There were 3,107 coronavirus patients nationally as of yesterday. That compares with 1,347 on October 28 and 2,132 on November 18.

On October 28 in NSW there were 820 COVID patients. Now there are 1,526. In Victoria, the figure has ballooned from 172 on October 28 to 713 yesterday.

Together with the spread of other infectious diseases and the consequences of decades of healthcare funding cuts, the increase is contributing to a breakdown of the hospital system.

Data released by the Australia Institute of Health and Welfare last week showed that surgery and emergency department waiting times for 2021?22 were the worst on record for at least twenty years. Across the country, almost 40 percent of patients were forced to spend more than four hours in an emergency department.

Commenting on the figures, Australian Medical

Association (AMA) president Professor Steve Robson said: “This week we have seen reports of children waiting up to 12 hours for emergency care and patients dying while ramped at hospitals, and we know that these are not isolated instances. These stories are just the tip of the iceberg.”

COVID deaths are once again rising. Last week there were 217 fatalities, the highest number since the end of September. That compares with a recent low of 83 for the week ending November 11.

The total death toll stands at 16,441. Some 14,202 of those deaths have been reported this year, compared with just over 2,220 fatalities in the first two years of the pandemic as a result of successful suppression measures.

8,344 of the deaths have been reported since May 21, meaning more people have died from COVID in the six months since the federal Labor government was elected than in the entire preceding period of the pandemic.

Labor has sped up and deepened the overturning of safety measures, spearheading the lifting of isolation requirements and the end of daily reporting. It did so having fully backed the bipartisan “reopening of the economy” that unleashed a COVID tsunami on the population in December last year.

Last week, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese tested positive for COVID for the second time in six months. The Labor leader has, since assuming office, been ostentatious in his own rejection of basic public health measures. Virtually every day he has posted pictures of himself to social media, meeting dignitaries and the general public without a mask or a pretense of social distancing.

The infection of the prime minister has been treated as a non-event in the official media. In fact, it cuts across the lies that previous COVID infections provide “natural immunity.” As recent studies have made plain, repeat infections damage the immune system and increase the risk of cardiovascular and other major health conditions.

In the face of growing infection, illness and death, governments are pressing ahead. They are proclaiming that this will be a “normal” holiday season and are doing everything to encourage the population to travel, and above all to spend their money. The governments, and the medical spokespeople who do their bidding, are claiming, without a shred of evidence, that the current

wave is likely to peak in the next week. Conveniently, that would be just in time for Christmas.

As with every aspect of the official COVID response, these assertions are transparently dictated by big business and the banks.

In reality, the policies being implemented by governments all but guarantee that infections, and consequently illness and death, will skyrocket over the coming weeks and months. This week a cruise liner docked in Sydney, with its passengers permitted to disembark. Half, or some 1,500, had tested positive or were showing symptoms of COVID infection. Given the restricted airflow on such vessels, there is every probability that the other 1,500 also have the virus. That is the second such disembarkation in less than a month.

Principled epidemiologists are again issuing warnings. In a submission to a Senate inquiry, the AMA condemned as “political weakness,” the refusal of governments to reinstate basic safety measures, including indoor mask mandates.

The warnings, however, will go unheeded by the authorities. What is at play is not “weakness,” indecision or confusion. Instead, the pandemic is revealing the true face of capitalism, which subordinates everything, including human life, to the profit interests of the ruling elite.



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