

The CDC cover-up of Omicron XBB.1.5 and the growing winter COVID surge

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Last week, it was revealed that over the past month the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has concealed the fact that a dangerous new variant of the coronavirus, known as the Omicron XBB.1.5 subvariant, has rapidly become dominant across the United States.

On December 29, epidemiologist Dr. Eric Feigl-Ding reported CDC data that was leaked to him showing that XBB.1.5 was already dominant in the US. One day after this Twitter thread went viral, the CDC updated its COVID-19 variant dashboard with the exact data that Dr. Feigl-Ding had reported. This same process unfolded between October 13 and October 14, 2022, at which time Dr. Feigl-Ding reported CDC data leaked to him showing that the Omicron BQ.1 and BQ.1.1 subvariants were becoming dominant, which was then confirmed by the CDC the following day under growing public pressure.

The CDC has a rule which stipulates that any variant that accounts for over one percent of sequenced cases must be reported, a rule they violated for nearly a month in December and September-October. After both leaks, the CDC has issued no public statement and the corporate media has dutifully omitted the very fact that there was a cover-up, with the *World Socialist Web Site* the only outlet that has made this clear.

The new XBB.1.5 variant, which now accounts for 40.5 percent of all sequenced COVID-19 infections in the US, rose to dominance more quickly than any other variant since Omicron first spread globally in November 2021. The XBB.1.5 variant is believed to have evolved in New York in October and is fueling a wave of infections and hospitalizations throughout the Northeast region, with hospitalization rates among people aged 70 and older approaching pandemic highs in some states. This age group already accounts for over 90 percent of all COVID-19 deaths in the US.

Due to the dismantling of PCR testing and the promotion of at-home rapid tests, which are not tallied by the government, official figures on infections in the US are now totally inaccurate. Wastewater data, however, show that the US is presently mired in the second-worst surge of infections of the entire pandemic, which is being driven by XBB.1.5 in the Northeast region.

Multiple scientists raised alarm bells about XBB.1.5

throughout December and earlier, with the variant earning the nickname “Kraken.” A recent blog post by scientist Dr. Eric Topol describes the biological characteristics of XBB.1.5 and the research that scientists have done so far.

In short, XBB.1.5 is believed to be the most immune-evasive variant to date, meaning that vaccinations and prior infection offer virtually no protection against breakthrough infection or reinfection. It has also been shown to bind more tightly to the hACE2 receptor, which scientists believe will make it more infectious than any previous variant.

Expressing her concern over XBB.1.5, Dr. Akiko Iwasaki, one of the world’s top immunologists, who has led pioneering research on Long COVID, tweeted on Monday: “Please protect yourselves and others by wearing N95 masks. I am truly concerned about the #longCOVID wave that follows this infection.”

In a follow-up tweet, Dr. Iwasaki elaborated that the features of XBB.1.5 “will increase tropism and possibly persistence in cell types that are long lived,” meaning the likelihood of developing Long COVID after infection with XBB.1.5 could be higher than with previous variants.

One scientist, whose models on the spread of XBB.1.5 were correct throughout December, created the visualization below to show the likely timeline of the coming wave. They estimate that by the end of January, XBB.1.5 will account for over 75 percent of all infections throughout the US, at which point the nationwide surge will be in full swing.

Furthermore, the US-grown XBB.1.5 variant is being exported globally, as shown in the visualization below. It has been detected across Europe, as well as in India, Australia, Colombia, China and other countries, with scientists predicting that it could become dominant globally.

Given what scientists have learned about the dangers of COVID-19 reinfections, as well as breakthrough infections, this potential global surge would have immense societal repercussions. Masses of people could be infected or reinfected with COVID-19, causing spikes in hospitalizations and deaths, compounding damage to the overall health of the population.

Under these conditions, the deliberate withholding of data on XBB.1.5 from the public ranks among the most significant cover-ups in the history of the CDC or any other public health

agency globally. There is no innocent explanation for the CDC cover-ups in December or October, which were clearly deliberate and intended to prevent any public alarm that might disrupt the holiday shopping and travel season.

Three years into the worst pandemic in a century, the CDC stands totally discredited as a public health agency. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been increasingly politicized, tailoring science to match all the lies of both the Trump and Biden administrations, in order to suit the needs of Wall Street and corporate America.

Over the course of 2022, the CDC deepened its antiscientific policies, publishing guidelines that discouraged the safe isolation of infected patients, masking and other critical mitigation measures, while manipulating data to match Biden's lie that "the pandemic is over."

Throughout December, CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky and White House COVID Response Coordinator Dr. Ashish Jha remained silent on the clear dangers of the XBB.1.5 variant and the pandemic more generally.

On December 30, Walensky broke her silence with a tweet stating, "We can't stop the spread of #COVID19." She praised the CDC's new policy requiring that all travelers from China must test negative for COVID-19 within two days of flying to the US. The same policy stipulates that the agency will conduct more genomic sequencing from China and other countries, ostensibly to "decrease the chance for entry of a novel variant of concern."

Walensky's tweet, released the day after Dr. Feigl-Ding's leak of the CDC data on XBB.1.5, was roundly denounced for its hypocrisy and implicit xenophobia against China. Some have speculated that the new CDC policy itself, released a day before the data on XBB.1.5 was leaked, could have been in preparations for a crude attempt to foist blame onto China for the emergence of XBB.1.5.

Walensky's claim that "We can't stop the spread of COVID-19" also provoked a flood of hostile comments, indicating the continued opposition that exists to the "herd immunity" policy now in place internationally.

In order to maintain the status quo and prevent the growth of an organized movement of workers and scientists to stop the pandemic, the powers that be rely on a layer of affluent official scientists in the government and media to promote misinformation and cultivate a sense of apathy in the population, in order to implement their criminal pandemic policies. In the US, Drs. Walensky, Jha, Anthony Fauci and others lead this work. In Germany, virologist Dr. Christian Drosten stated in December that the pandemic is "over," prompting politicians from numerous parties to call for the ending of all mitigation measures in the new year. The same coordinated lies and deception have been pushed internationally.

The relentless propaganda campaign in the West itself had an impact within China, where sections of the middle class and the

Chinese Communist Party (CCP) bureaucracy became increasingly convinced that Omicron was "mild" and Zero-COVID had to be scrapped. The encirclement of China with a global "forever COVID" policy, combined with relentless economic and geopolitical pressures, prompted the CCP to lift Zero-COVID, unleashing a tidal wave of infections and deaths throughout the country.

In the *World Socialist Web Site's* 2023 New Year statement, Joseph Kishore and David North warned:

The lifting of Zero-COVID in China and the adoption of a "forever COVID" policy marks a new and potentially even more dangerous stage in the pandemic. Scientists have warned that mass infection increases the likelihood that new variants will evolve. The world's capitalist ruling elites are playing Russian roulette with society, raising the danger that a more infectious, immune-resistant and deadly variant could unleash an even more lethal global wave of infections.

At this point, the XBB.1.5 variant does not appear to be more lethal than prior variants, but only time will tell. The warnings that it could be more likely to cause Long COVID are ominous, as there are already hundreds of millions of people globally suffering from this affliction.

The dangerous process of viral evolution of the coronavirus must be stopped through the building of a mass movement of the international working class fighting to put an end to the pandemic. This must be connected to the conscious struggle against the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, the threat of nuclear war, the deepening climate crisis, and all the immense social problems created by world capitalism.

The year 2022 witnessed a significant growth of the class struggle globally, which will continue in the coming year. The most critical task is the building of a revolutionary leadership in the working class, fighting for the strategy of world socialist revolution.



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