

Despite Biden's lies, the COVID emergency continues

Evan Blake
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On Monday, the Biden administration announced its intention to formally end the COVID-19 national emergency and public health emergency declarations on May 11. This is a deeply reactionary and unscientific policy change, which will have vast consequences for the American and international working class.

The statement announcing the end date of the states of emergency is framed as a response to two bills introduced in January in the Republican-controlled House of Representatives, one of which is titled the "Pandemic is Over Act." Under conditions in which an average of over 500 Americans are presently dying from COVID-19 every day, both big business parties are colluding to codify into law Biden's false declaration last September that "the pandemic is over."

The immediate implication of this policy change is that all government funding related to the pandemic will be ended, in what amounts to the final privatization of the US pandemic response. The most severely impacted section of the population will be the roughly 30 million uninsured Americans, who will lose access to free COVID-19 testing, treatments and vaccines. Pfizer intends to sell its vaccine at the extremely marked-up price of up to \$130 per dose, while at-home tests sell for \$10 each in the US--unaffordable costs for the vast majority of uninsured Americans.

Another 60 million Medicare recipients will have to pay at least partially for at-home tests, testing-related services, and all COVID-19 treatments, while privately insured individuals could incur out-of-pocket costs for COVID-19 testing.

Broader changes to Medicare and Medicaid will also take place with the ending of the emergency declarations. The Kaiser Family Foundation estimates that 5-14 million Americans will lose Medicaid coverage altogether, after enrollment in the program grew by 28 percent between February 2020 and September 2022. Telehealth services

for Medicare beneficiaries will be cut off after 2024, despite the increased popularity of these services during the pandemic.

The planned *de jure* ending of the pandemic emergency in the US is a political and social measure totally divorced from the science of epidemiology and virology, which make clear the multiple reasons why the pandemic is ongoing and could worsen dramatically at any moment.

First, the pandemic is a global phenomenon that cannot be declared "over" by any single country. Indeed, on the same day that the White House released its statement, the World Health Organization (WHO) reaffirmed that the public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) first declared in January 2020 should continue.

One of the primary factors motivating the WHO decision is the unprecedented wave of infections and deaths sweeping across China, where a majority of the country's 1.4 billion people are estimated to have been infected and nearly 1 million are believed to have died from COVID-19 in the past two months alone. This horror is the direct result of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) lifting of the Zero-COVID public health policy, demanded by US imperialism for over two years.

Second, SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, is continuing to evolve at a rapid clip, with the mass infection in China only accelerating this process. Over the past year, the US experienced five distinct waves of infections and deaths from different Omicron subvariants that evolved in different parts of the world and spread globally.

The most recent surge in the US has been driven by the XBB.1.5 subvariant, nicknamed "Kraken" due to its extreme immune-evasion properties, which give it the ability to infect people who are vaccinated, previously infected, or both. A growing number of people globally are being reinfected by this and other Omicron subvariants, with each reinfection proven to increase

one's risk of hospitalization, death or debilitation with Long COVID.

When asked, every principled virologist in the world would acknowledge that at any point a far more dangerous variant could evolve, combining greater immune-evasion, transmissibility and virulence, thereby causing the worst global surge of the pandemic to date. The policies of lifting all mitigation measures and encouraging people to believe the pandemic is over, now pursued in the US, China and globally, leaves society totally unprepared for this potentiality.

Third, while official figures on infections and deaths are now inaccurate, examining wastewater and excess deaths shows that the “new normal” is a persistently high baseline of mass infections and deaths throughout the world.

In the US, wastewater sampling indicates that for most of the past year, viral transmission was at or near the peak levels reached during the first winter surge in 2020-21 and the surge of the Delta variant in the summer of 2021. Excess deaths in the US remain elevated far above pre-pandemic levels, at 680 deaths per day, according to *The Economist*. Globally, there are an estimated 12,200 daily excess deaths attributable to the pandemic.

The formal ending of the declaration of emergency in the US takes place after a year of relentless propaganda claiming that “Omicron is mild” and COVID-19 is now “endemic” and no more harmful than the flu—lies used to justify the scrapping of all anti-COVID mitigation measures in the US.

The impact of this policy has fallen most heavily on older Americans of retirement age, with over 90 percent of all COVID-19 deaths now affecting people 65 years or older. Indeed, the American ruling class has worked out a systematic and deliberate plan to allow the death of the aged and those with disabilities and illnesses.

This was most clearly articulated by eugenicist Ezekiel Emanuel—a close adviser to the Biden White House—who declared in a widely-denounced tweet last week, “Death is a loss but living too long is also a loss. It leaves most of us debilitated and unable to contribute to society. We are no longer remembered as being vibrant and engaged, but instead as feeble and ineffectual.”

The pandemic is being utilized to implement the ruling class's long-stated aim of lowering life expectancy in the US, in order to reduce pension and health care costs.

The ending of formal pandemic declarations of emergency in the US will reverberate internationally due to the central influence of Wall Street and US

imperialism. This has taken place at every turn of the pandemic, from the initial back-to-work campaign in March 2020, to the lifting of mask mandates in 2021, to the final scrapping of all mitigation measures over the course of 2022.

The efforts of capitalist governments to prematurely declare the pandemic over must be resisted by the international working class. The perpetual spread of COVID-19 and evolution of new variants are not inevitable biological processes, but rather the product of social policies that can be stopped through the conscious intervention of masses of working people who bear the brunt of the pandemic.

The global deployment of all available public health measures—including mass testing, contact tracing, the safe isolation of infected patients, the universal use of N95 or better masks, the temporary closure of schools and nonessential workplaces, and more—combined with the renovation of air filtration and ventilation systems in all indoor public spaces, could quickly eliminate COVID-19 throughout the world.

The visceral hostility of capitalist governments to such a global elimination program over the past three years is a damning indictment of this outmoded social system. The same criminal ruling elites who have prioritized corporate profits and overseen the deaths of over 21 million people globally are now plunging mankind into a Third World War between nuclear-armed powers. While declaring the pandemic “over,” they are preparing to unleash a catastrophe of far greater dimensions.

The working class, armed with a revolutionary socialist program, must unite internationally to overthrow capitalism, stop the pandemic and the threat of nuclear war, and rebuild society on socialist foundations.



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