

COVID-19 is a leading cause of death in children in the US, study finds

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A study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, (JAMA) on Monday shows that COVID-19 is a leading cause of death among children ages 0-19 in the United States.

By analyzing death certificates of children and young people in the United States between August 1, 2021 and July 31, 2022, researchers found that COVID-19 ranked “eighth among all causes of death, fifth in disease-related causes of death (excluding unintentional injuries, suicide and assault), and first in deaths caused by infectious or respiratory disease.”

The period of study included the Delta and Omicron waves of the pandemic, which ripped through US schools and caused record infections, hospitalizations and deaths among children. However, the authors found that even in the pre-Delta period of the pandemic, COVID-19 still ranked as the ninth-leading cause of death in children. As well, the disease was a leading cause of death within each age group, ranking seventh among ages less than 1 and ages 1-4; sixth among children ages 5-9 and 10-14; and fifth among those ages 15-19.

The findings explode the myth that COVID-19 is mild in children and that it is nothing more than the “flu.” Influenza itself is a harmful disease that needlessly kills between dozens and hundreds of children in the US each year, including at least 91 this season according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data. Still, COVID-19 is far deadlier than the flu.

The study identified 821 deaths in which COVID-19 was listed as the underlying cause of death, compared to 472 deaths attributed to “influenza and pneumonia” in the same period, which, the authors note, is a category that may include multiple pathogens. The crude death rate among children (reported deaths compared to the estimated population size) for COVID-19 was 1.0 per 100,000, compared to .6 per 100,000 for “influenza and pneumonia.”

The authors note that their findings may underestimate the true mortality burden of COVID-19 in children for a number of reasons, including that “analyses of excess deaths have

suggested under-reporting bias for COVID-19 deaths” and that the “criteria for classifying COVID-19 deaths is heterogeneous across states and has changed over time.” Further, they only counted those death certificates which listed COVID-19 as the underlying cause of death and not a contributing cause of death; nor was the impact of long-term sequelae (Long COVID) likely captured in their data.

Significantly, a recent study by the CDC found that at least 3,500 people in the US have died from Long COVID since the start of the pandemic, though the true figure is certainly higher for many of the same reasons cited above, in addition to the fact that guidance for clinically identifying and reporting Long COVID is continuously changing.

Among children, the CDC has found that those previously infected with COVID-19 were at higher risk of a number of serious and potentially life-threatening conditions affecting the lungs, heart, veins and kidneys. These include increased incidences of cardiomyopathy and myocarditis, heart conditions which account for approximately 11.8 and 4.6 percent of cardiovascular deaths in children respectively, according to a study in the *American Heart Journal*. The umbrella term “diseases of the heart” ranked as the seventh leading cause of death among children in the JAMA study.

Additionally, over 9,300 children have been afflicted with multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C), a serious condition associated with COVID-19. The CDC has recorded 76 deaths in children due to MIS-C to date.

The finding that COVID-19 is a leading cause of death in children comes as President Joe Biden, who declared in September that the “pandemic is over,” announced Monday that in May the federal government will terminate both the public health emergency and the national emergency declared for the pandemic.

In practice, this means that what little remains of free testing, vaccines and treatments will be cut off and the cost of these essential measures will be offloaded by the ruling class onto the backs of the working class. At the same time,

millions of people are set to lose Medicaid health insurance beginning April 1, and extra food assistance provided to SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) recipients will also end in March.

The pandemic, in reality, continues to maim and kill thousands of people in the US each week. Even with severe limitations in testing and data reporting, the current 7-day rolling average for deaths in the US is 468 per day according to Our World in Data, or 3,276 per week.

Children are also dying each week. As the *World Socialist Web Site* has previously explained in its reporting on pediatric COVID-19 deaths, the database for classifying deaths based on death certificates lags far behind the agency's COVID-19 Data Tracker that records deaths based on direct reports from state health agencies. Official death certificates can take as long as six months to be finalized.

According to Data Tracker, 2,032 children ages 0-17 have died from COVID-19, 57 of whom were added in January 2023.

By comparison, the CDC's interactive page monitoring the pediatric mortality impact of influenza recorded 2,147 deaths between 2004 and the present. In other words, COVID-19 has killed approximately as many children in three years as influenza did in nearly 20 years.

It is no hyperbole to characterize the pandemic as a brutal and ongoing experiment upon an entire generation. The latest sero-prevalence survey by the CDC estimates that 96.3 percent of all US children have been infected with SARS-CoV-2 *at least once*. In total, over 180,000 children in the US have been hospitalized over the course of the pandemic.

Whereas in 2020 and 2021 there remained limited mitigation measures in schools, these were virtually all thrown out in 2022 under the "guidance" of the CDC itself and with the full endorsement of the national teachers unions, which have played the instrumental role of stifling educators' opposition to mass infection and forcing millions of teachers and students back into virus-filled classrooms. These conditions led to the unprecedented "triple pandemic" that ravaged the pediatric population this past fall, filling hospitals to capacity with children sick with RSV, flu, COVID-19 or any combination of the three.

On the world scale, a study published in December found COVID-19 to be *the* leading cause of death globally in 2021, ahead of both ischemic heart disease and cancer. CNN reported that preliminary figures show that despite killing fewer Americans in 2022 than 2021, COVID-19 is projected to remain the third leading cause of death in the US overall for 2022.

By consciously pursuing policies of mass infection that will lead to millions of deaths each year, capitalist governments around the world have carried out a program of

"social murder," particularly targeting the elderly and immunocompromised.

In the statement, "2023: The global capitalist crisis and the growing offensive of the international working class," Joseph Kishore and David North write that "there is no precedent in modern history for governments that are not openly fascistic implementing policies that it is known will result in mass illness and death. But this is precisely what all the capitalist states have done over the course of the pandemic." This response, they continue, can leave no doubt as to how these governments will respond to even greater threats.

That these policies have not spared children, the most innocent and helpless layer of society, proves the total incorrigibility of the entire capitalist system, including both the Republican and Democratic parties and the pseudo-left organizations that provide cover for the latter. Despite the existence of all the necessary medical and technological tools to totally eliminate COVID-19 on a world scale, all matters of social life, including public health, are subordinate to private profit.

Ending the pandemic, therefore, requires a political movement against the capitalist system, led by the international working class, which is breaking into open struggle across the world. This objective upsurge of class struggle must become politically conscious and have as its goal the socialist transformation of society. The *World Socialist Web Site*, through the Global Workers Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic, is the only political tendency fighting for this strategy.



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