

Immunocompromised mother in Manhattan speaks to Global Workers' Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic

Tim Avery
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Melanie is an immunocompromised parent raising two children in upper Manhattan with her partner. Her daughter is 13 years old and her son is 4.

At 42 years old, Melanie takes over 10 pills a day, including eight for her two auto-immune diseases, lupus and Sjögren's syndrome.

The World Socialist Web Site recently interviewed Melanie for the Global Workers' Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic. The interview has been edited for brevity and clarity. Melanie's real name has not been used at her request.

Tim Avery: How has the pandemic affected you and your family?

Melanie: I personally came down with COVID in November of last year. It was not a good experience at all. I believe I got it from my daughter's school, because her school shut down the week before Thanksgiving when 17 teachers out of 64 turned up positive for the virus.

I think it spread through the community from her school and I wound up getting it, sadly. It was panic mode. I live in a small apartment. Even though I wore a mask while I had it and tried to avoid my kids, it was extremely hard because I still had to do my duties as a mom.

I had previously gotten sick in October. Since I was hospitalized on a Saturday, my partner had to stay home to watch our children, and he wound up getting fired from the restaurant he worked at the next day. He has not been able to obtain a job since.

At my daughter's school, I haven't seen any uptick in cases lately, but at my son's school I know there was at least one case. It's a scarier experience for my son because he's autistic, and he doesn't like to have anything around his mouth.

The problem I'm encountering with my son is not so much COVID-19, he's just getting sick a whole lot. Last

week he recovered from an ear infection, he went back to school Monday of this week, and by Wednesday he had a runny nose again, he was coughing, and I had to keep him out of school. I took him to an urgent care clinic on Thursday, he got a fever, and I had to keep him out.

So, my son hasn't been able to go to school a full week without getting sick. When the urgent care clinic prescribed him ibuprofen, I went to CVS and they didn't even have it, so I've had to call my mom who's out of state to see if she can send me medication I can have on hand for both my kids.

This is my thing: If we're still having people who are dying from COVID on a daily basis, there still needs to be awareness of that and there still need to be precautions in place. I really don't like that they're trying to push the narrative that things are back to normal, that the economy is growing—which I think, excuse my language, is utter B.S., because it's not growing.

People are suffering, like myself. I don't work, I can't work. Others out there who were working and lost their jobs due to medical reasons haven't been able to recover or find work. It is not easy. The way that they want to pay people, it's not enough to survive, especially with food prices at an all-time high. I just had to ask my mom to send me money again so I can have a little food in my house until I get my food stamps on Tuesday.

So, the pandemic has messed up my life. I don't even know, with my health, what type of damage I have. It's scary. Just going to the doctor's, I have to be really cautious about certain things to make sure that I'm actually getting the care that I need and that I actually know the truth of what's going on with my body.

TA: I heard you were keeping one or both of your children out of school for a time—can you tell us more about that?

Melanie: I kept my oldest remote for a little over two years. She has a leak in her heart, and I was afraid with all the cases in her school. She was also not mentally in the right frame of mind to go back into school, because she was worried about that herself.

She was supposed to go back to in-person learning in March of 2021. We were at the cardiologist when I got the news, because I was trying to make sure that it was okay for her to go back. When we found out, she started plucking out her eyelashes and her eyebrows.

So, I made the decision that it wasn't right for her to go back. I spoke to the superintendent and obtained a letter from her psychiatrist and her therapist and she was able to stay remote.

My son has an IEP [Individualized Education Plan] for his autism—he needed physical therapy, occupational therapy and essential instruction—so he was doing that for a while. So, I kind of held him back from pre-K because, at the time, they weren't offering vaccines for young children, so I was actually more afraid for him because he's younger.

My son went back to in-person learning in September of last year. My daughter went back in August of last year. She's been enduring a lot of bullying. Academically, I think her school hasn't been helping her to the fullest, and I've been going back and forth with them about that since September because she's currently failing one of her classes.

TA: Do you get communication about COVID-19 cases in your children's schools?

Melanie: No. Honestly, with my daughter's school, no. I think all schools try to keep it on the hush-hush. My son's school is a little more transparent, they still send tests home if they've had a case in the schools, which I think might be because they're dealing with younger children. If there happens to be a case in his class, they already have a Google classroom set up as a backup.

TA: Do you know whether your children's schools open the windows or have modern filtration systems that can remove the COVID-19 virus from the air?

Melanie: With my son's school, no. His classroom is on the second floor and it's inward. I visited once and didn't see any filtration systems or open windows. I think my daughter's school sometimes opens the windows, but I don't believe they have any filtration systems either.

TA: What are some other concerns you have about your children's schools?

Melanie: My daughter goes to a charter school. I say to them, if you've seen a lot of cases of COVID, shouldn't

you offer hybrid or remote learning? The school has the funding. They can do it if they want to, all charter schools can do it, they just don't want to do it.

My daughter is scared of me passing away. I can sit there and tell her everything's going to be okay, but she's still going to worry because she knows my medical condition. I have to let her know my medical condition, because, God forbid, if something happens and someone asks her "what does your mommy have?" I need my daughter to know what I have.

TA: The Democratic and Republican parties have put billions of dollars into bank bailouts and, more recently, escalating the war in Ukraine rather than education. What do you think about this?

Melanie: I think them investing all this money into the war in Ukraine has taken a toll on the US. Look what the cost of eggs is: \$10. You've got people who can't afford to stay in their apartments. You've got people who can't afford to get food because now meat has gotten to be \$30 or more. I'm sure [baby] formula is still an issue. And now you've got cough syrup, Tylenol, ibuprofen. Giving Ukraine billions and billions of dollars when we can't even survive here in the United States is not how you fix the United States.

TA: The WSWS has called for a global policy of eliminating COVID-19—that is, using lockdowns, high-quality masks, air filters, and every tool in the arsenal of public health to put an end to the virus once and for all. Do you think society's wealth should be redirected for this purpose?

Melanie: Yes, we should. The US should invest more money toward COVID-19. The virus has mutated so much, we can't keep track of it. COVID kills more people than the flu and pneumonia, it does more damage. If there were more investment toward COVID, the world would be a better place, but because the narrative of the US is "we've got to keep the economy moving," they don't care.



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