

# One kindergartner dead, more hospitalized and sickened as unidentified infections spread through Detroit elementary schools

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4 May 2023

*We encourage educators, students, and parents in the Detroit area who have stories, experiences or information they wish to share on this outbreak or other school conditions to contact the WSWS Educators Newsletter and get involved in the fight to save lives!*

The Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD) announced on Wednesday the emergency closure of Marcus Garvey Academy after a Kindergarten student tragically died from an unknown illness. Focus: HOPE Center for Children, a second unrelated daycare facility, also was forced to close, as sickness spread to at least 25 children.

At least two other elementary school children have been hospitalized in the past week and dozens more have been reported sick. School officials are reporting that the medical examiner has not yet determined the cause of death of the kindergartner from Garvey Academy. There is currently scant information on the child who died, though some reports say the death occurred last week, prompting the obvious question of why it has taken so long for the schools to be closed.

The DPSCD has done little to inform parents of the details of the crisis, let alone provide an adequate response to keep students and staff safe in the infected schools and the district at large.

What is known about the current cluster of infections, or at least what is being made known to the public, is minimal: the illness seems to currently be limited to young children, 4–7 years old specifically. Those who have experienced more severe illness reported feeling lethargic and had high fever and/or headaches. Other children vomited, felt nausea and had abdominal pain, according to local reports.

On Thursday morning Focus: HOPE reported that 17 cases at their day care have been identified as hand, foot and mouth disease, a common children’s virus causing sores in the mouth and a rash on the hands and feet. However, at this point nothing has been issued from the Detroit Health Department confirming this report.

The department was made aware of the eruption of illness in the first school on Monday of this week, and the second school on Tuesday. However, officials with the Detroit Health

Department have reported that the group of infections first spread through multiple classrooms at an elementary school in mid-April.

Neither the Detroit Health Department nor the school district mentions COVID-19 at all in their initial messages to parents. The official district communication states that they are examining an “unusually high rate of flu symptoms” among students, specifically in early-grade-level students. The health department merely refers to an “increase in illness.”

Whether or not this cluster of illness turns out to be COVID-19—if such information is even ever disclosed—the cowardice and duplicity of DPSCD regarding the lives of children and the school staff are on full display in this crisis.

The school district, which was fully complicit in the forced reopening of schools at the height of the pandemic, is once again pandering to the needs of the political establishment and not the children it claims to protect. It is no coincidence that they are attributing the crisis to a mysterious “flu-like” illness just one week before President Joe Biden revokes the public health emergency which has been in place since the start of the pandemic.

As for the union, there has been virtually no communication on the matter. In fact, teachers posting on social media report that they discovered the news of the kindergarten death, along with the school closures, from the news media.

Venessa Dawson, admin for DPS Warriors Fight Back, expressed the sentiments of most teachers in a recent post:

What in the hexxxxx is going on? A Kindergartner from Garvey has died with some type of infection. A second school is said to have closed as well!—What is it and apparently it’s spreading. No email or warning from Vitti—nothing. We have to find out from the news. We are seeing a ton of students sick and the district is not supplying any more PPE. My poor babies are asking for masks. When a child coughs or sneezes, everyone is uncomfortable. I AM SICK OF THIS NEGLECT!

Outrage is quickly spreading among educators, parents and community members throughout the district who are once again gravely concerned about the well-being of their students, children and the broader community. Many parents have raised the obvious concern that children with siblings who attend other schools, which are not closing, are at high risk of spreading the illness to those schools and rapidly escalating the scale of the crisis.

One tweet on the crisis has received tens of thousands of views and hundreds of retweets and likes. One user commented, “What has happened to our CDC? Covid is still novel with very little confirmed information on the long-term health effects or why random people die from it. Kids, elderly, obese, immune compromised, developmentally delayed. Every demographic is affected with no common denominator.”

Another wrote: “What kind of society doesn’t do everything in its power to protect young and innocent children from danger? So disheartening.”

Commenting on the entirety of the COVID response in schools, another wrote: “Since when was May considered flu season?? Honestly it’s just beyond disgusting at this point. Our kids have been failed for the last 3 years and it looks set to continue.”

One concerned teacher from Cass Technical High School spoke to the WSWS on the issue, saying, “Children are dying because almost nothing is being done.” When asked about Biden planning to end all mitigation measures in one week because the government maintains the pandemic is over, she said, “I didn’t get the memo on the pandemic. The pandemic is not over. People are still getting sick.”

She continued: “I personally [believe] people should be wearing a mask... at the end of the day it’s all about the money. They want us to be in the classrooms so that parents can be at work.”

Referring to the political system, she added, “Regardless of which party... both parties do not care if it is not going to benefit them.”

DPSCD has reported that the two closed schools are undergoing a “deep clean using industrial strength cleaning solutions” and are scheduled to reopen Monday, May 8. However, a “deep cleaning” will do nothing to guard against the spread of diseases such as COVID-19, which spread through the air, a process referred to as aerosolization. The “deep cleaning,” while no doubt necessary in the underfunded Detroit school system, is primarily a measure taken to justify getting kids back in classrooms.

Moreover the ongoing layoffs of Detroit teachers and support staff will mean even more children packed in together as class sizes increase.

Workers, and in particular school workers and parents, have been through an enormous experience over the course of the pandemic. The forced reopening of schools during the height of COVID was a central pillar of the broader campaign, backed by

both political parties and the teachers unions, to place profit over lives and reopen the economy, no matter the costs.

The devastating and deadly impact that these decisions have had on society are still being unearthed.

A study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) earlier this year shows that COVID-19 is in fact still a leading cause of death among children ages 0–19 in the United States.

This study analyzed 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 findings explode the myth, once again, that COVID-19 is mild in children and that it is nothing more than the “flu.” Moreover these deaths are continuing today. According to Data Tracker, 2,032 children ages 0–17 have died from COVID-19, *57 of whom were added in January 2023 alone.*

Given that school districts across the country are under immense pressure to not report or properly investigate possible COVID-19 outbreak, such as in the circumstances unfolding in Detroit, there is no doubt that the death toll is even higher than the official figures reveal.

The fact of the matter is that we are only just beginning to understand the full impact of COVID-19 on children.

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. Additionally, over 9,300 children have been afflicted with multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C), a serious condition associated with COVID-19.

What the unfolding events in Detroit reveal is that all the underlying motives which drove the disastrous response to the COVID-19 pandemic on a world scale persist today. The response of DPSCD, the Detroit Health Department and the trade union apparatus is criminal and insufficient. The schools must be closed until the “mystery illness” is understood and eradicated!

If the lives of educators, students and the broader community are to be protected, there must be a fight organized independently of the trade unions and both political parties.

This fight is already well underway in the Detroit area. We urge all those who wish to get involved to contact the WSWS *Educators Newsletter* and get involved in the fight to save lives!



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