

Six-year-old dies in Detroit school-based outbreak: What remains of public health after three years of the pandemic?

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On April 26, two days after his sixth birthday, Jimari Williams died from a still-unidentified illness. He was a kindergarten student at Marcus Garvey Academy on the East Side of Detroit, where several other children were also sickened in what is being called a cluster of “flu-like illnesses.”

In an earlier period, events like this—the sudden death of a small child in a school-based outbreak in a major American city—would be treated by the state as a serious emergency. Agencies like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) would be mobilized to take control of the situation, warn the public and save lives.

But the official response to Jimari’s death, which took place just one week before the World Health Organization (WHO) fraudulently declared the COVID-19 public health emergency to be over, and two weeks before the Biden administration will do the same on May 11, offers a glimpse of the new post-public health era. Going forward, widespread death and illness will be officially ignored and covered up, and the motto will be “every man, woman and child for themselves.”

Jimari died in hospital on April 26, but school officials did not even inform other parents about his death. A parent of one of Jimari’s schoolmates told the WSWs, “They never mentioned him or his passing in any of their communication with parents.” His death is also not mentioned in a May 3 statement from the Detroit Health Department, titled *Regarding Apparent Increase in Illness Amongst Elementary Students*. The statement merely takes note of “reports of symptomatic students at Garvey.”

At a poorly promoted online meeting on Friday, May

5, when a question was raised about Jimari’s death, school board officials cut off the microphone and the moderator exclaimed, “That is a media question... this is not a media meeting.” The meeting revealed that officials had not identified the majority of the illnesses affecting students at the school, that there would be no mask mandate upon the school’s reopening on Monday, May 8, and that no systematic testing was being done for COVID-19 or other pathogens.

It is still not known what disease killed Jimari. As of this writing, four of the cases at Garvey have reportedly been identified as linked to the bacteria *H. Influenza*, but Jimari is not one of them.

Marcus Garvey Academy was briefly closed from May 3 through May 5 for “deep cleaning,” but this was totally insufficient. Wiping down surfaces with bleach and other such measures will have no impact on the spread of airborne diseases, including COVID-19.

While the corporate media initially reported Jimari’s death, it was immediately dropped and not a single national outlet has covered the outbreak since Marcus Garvey Academy reopened Monday.

Conspicuously absent from all official statements and media coverage about the outbreak has been any mention of COVID-19, which, according to the CDC, has killed 2,203 children in the past three years. Contrary to all the lies and propaganda emanating from the Biden administration that “the pandemic is over,” the coronavirus continues to spread and mutate all over the world. While systematic tracking of the virus has been dismantled, some 12,000 “excess deaths” are still attributable to the pandemic each day globally.

Even if Jimari did not die of COVID-19, his health was almost certainly impacted by it. As of January

2023, the CDC estimates that 96.3 percent of US children (65.7 million kids) have had COVID-19 at least once. The disease is known to potentially damage all organ systems, including the immune system, making those who have had COVID-19 more likely to get seriously ill from other diseases.

Teachers are also at enormous risk. A WSWS independent investigation indicates that by now over 10,000 US teachers have likely died of COVID-19. Many teachers have been infected repeatedly and have therefore likely suffered serious damage to their immune system.

Under these conditions, the policies of the WHO and every capitalist government are social crimes that signal the end of the era of public health and a revival of the Social Darwinist conception of “survival of the fittest.”

As the WSWS wrote in a recent Perspective column:

The WHO’s ending of the PHEIC [Public Health Emergency of International Concern] represents a complete and total abrogation of all modern public health policy, which has centered on preventing and stopping outbreaks of deadly pathogens and fighting for the elimination and eradication of communicable diseases.

The plan by the White House to end the national COVID-19 public health emergency this Thursday is the culmination of the American ruling class’s policy of mass infection, first under the Republican Trump and then under the Democrat Biden. Biden has, in particular, relied on the teachers’ unions, headed by figures like American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten, to carry out the barbaric experiment of fully reopening schools without any anti-COVID mitigation measures, thereby subjecting children, teachers and their families to mass infection.

In Detroit, which has been controlled by the Democratic Party for decades, Democratic Mayor Mike Duggan and the Detroit Federation of Teachers have remained silent on the death of Jimari Williams and the infectious disease outbreak at Marcus Garvey Academy.

The example of Jimari Williams shows how the

population will be treated by the capitalist state and media from now on: Workers and children will get sick and die at school and work and nothing will be done. Causes of death will not even be identified. No one will be told what is happening. Reporting will be suppressed. And when another pandemic emerges, which scientists warn is increasingly likely as climate change deepens, there will be no attempt to stop it. Nothing at all will be done to save lives.

This is what capitalism has in store for workers in the US and around the world.

The only political party that has continuously opposed the deadly, profit-driven response to the pandemic is the Socialist Equality Party, together with its sister parties around the world affiliated with the International Committee of the Fourth International. We call for a socialist public health program, in which workplace safety will be controlled by committees of rank-and-file workers, and in the schools by rank-and-file committees of educators, parents and students.

A network of Educators’ Rank-and-File Safety Committees, including in Michigan, was founded in 2020 to organize opposition and stop the spread of COVID-19 in the schools to save lives. These committees are required now more than ever, as COVID-19 and other pathogens needlessly spread unchecked through schools and other workplaces, and the ruling elites implement ruthless austerity policies to fund massive military budgets.

Fundamentally, the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the brutality and irrationality of the capitalist system, which must be replaced with a planned world socialist society in which human needs and public health take precedence over private profit.



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