

US flying blind amid warnings of new COVID-19 surge

Evan Blake
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By multiple early indications, the United States has entered yet another surge of the COVID-19 pandemic, with wastewater levels, emergency room visits for COVID-19 and test positivity rates all on the rise across much of the country.

Between June 24 and July 12, the Biobot wastewater tracker showed a 46 percent increase nationally, concentrated in the South and on the coasts. According to one infectious disease modeler, these wastewater levels translate to roughly 280,000 Americans presently being infected with COVID-19 each day and rising.

The latest data from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show that there were 10.7 percent more emergency department visits for COVID-19 nationally last week compared to the previous week, with Alaska, Florida and Hawaii reporting the highest rates of growth. CDC data also show that test positivity rates nationally were up by 0.7 percent last week, with Arizona, Arkansas, Idaho, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas and Washington logging rates above 7 percent.

If these data continue along current trends, this will be the first surge in the US since the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Biden administration ended their COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE) declarations in early May.

These premature and unscientific decisions prompted numerous world governments to stop virtually all surveillance of the pandemic. In the US, the CDC abruptly ended all COVID-19 case reporting, while the Biden administration disbanded the White House COVID Response Team and CDC Director Rochelle Walensky resigned from her post.

As a result of the ending of COVID-19 case reporting, it is impossible to correlate early warning signs like wastewater data and emergency room admissions with national or local statistics on the number of COVID-19 cases. These simply do not exist, because the means to track them have been systematically dismantled.

In response to this total abrogation of public health, every corporate media outlet in the world largely stopped covering the pandemic altogether, a sinister form of silent propaganda meant to provide cover for the ongoing crimes of the capitalist ruling elites.

On Monday, *New York Times* columnist David Leonhardt

broke this silence with a dishonest and evidently mistimed editorial that cherry-picked a single data point in just four countries to falsely proclaim that “the pandemic really is over.”

Leonhardt is the *Times*’ pandemic minimizer-in-chief. Through his widely read newsletter *The Morning*, which was launched in May 2020 to serve as a daily pandemic update, he has repeatedly declared the pandemic over prematurely, discouraged masking and other mitigation measures, downplayed the severity of COVID-19 in children and immunocompromised people, erased the experience of millions suffering from Long COVID, and sought to elevate individualism as the guiding principle of public health policy.

Leonhardt’s pragmatic, shortsighted and unscientific views epitomize and guide those of the *Times*’ largely affluent middle-class subscribers, and have helped craft and justify every criminal pandemic policy of the Biden administration over the past two-and-a-half years. Earlier in the pandemic, Biden himself stated that he was one of Leonhardt’s readers.

Titled, “A Positive Covid Milestone,” Monday’s newsletter cites data indicating that excess deaths in the United States, India, Britain and Brazil are currently at pre-pandemic levels. From this single data point, Leonhardt draws the sweeping and false conclusions that “[t]he pandemic is finally over,” COVID-19 is no longer “a dire threat to large numbers of people” and “the virus has turned into an ordinary illness.”

Leonhardt, who is widely loathed by principled epidemiologists and scientists who have sought to educate the public throughout the pandemic, was lambasted on Twitter for his latest piece of drivel. One of the most widely shared rebuttals of Leonhardt came from health law scholar and bioethicist Blake Murdoch of the University of Alberta.

“False,” Murdoch wrote. “If the pandemic was truly over, excess deaths would run significantly below historical averages for quite a while, reflecting all the people who didn’t die because they already died prematurely of covid. Many people are still dying.”

In addition to drawing sweeping conclusions from this single data point, the fundamental fallacy of Leonhardt’s argument is its nationalist perspective. By definition, a pandemic is a global phenomenon whose development is not determined by any single country.

When examined at the global level, the data point that Leonhardt cites—excess deaths—clearly remains highly elevated, with *The Economist* estimating that nearly 9,000 people continue to die each day globally above pre-pandemic figures. In total, there are now 24.1 million excess deaths, with nearly one million added to the death toll every three months.

Further, the pandemic cannot be measured solely by excess deaths. In this respect, Leonhardt’s cherry-picking of this data point underscores the dishonesty of his writing. The words “variant,” “viral evolution,” “Long COVID,” “cases,” “testing” and “wastewater” are all omitted from his article, because each of these facets of the pandemic shows that it is ongoing and remains a threat to masses of people globally.

Alongside the evident surge in the US, Japan is now in the grips of its ninth wave of the pandemic, centered on the poorest island, Okinawa. Hospitals are once again strained to capacity, with one healthcare worker telling the *Okinawa Times*, “The situation is not so much a medical crisis as a collapse of the system.”

This follows China’s massive second wave of the pandemic in recent months after the disastrous lifting of its Zero-COVID elimination strategy last winter.

For those suffering from Long COVID—now estimated at roughly 20 million Americans and potentially hundreds of millions more people globally—the pandemic is an ongoing nightmare. As he has done throughout the pandemic, Leonhardt ignores and covers up this hidden iceberg of masses consigned to a fate of perpetual disability with no end in sight.

Finally, contrary to the self-deluded view of the *Times* and the Biden administration that “the pandemic really is over” and “the virus has turned into an ordinary illness,” principled scientists remain deeply concerned about the ongoing dangers of viral evolution.

Speaking at last month’s American Society for Virology conference, noted evolutionary biologist Trevor Bedford stressed that SARS-CoV-2 is “evolving just as fast as it was in 2021, evolving about two-and-a-half times faster than influenza H3N2... and is not really showing signs of slowing down.”

In one of the sharpest warnings against the flippant outlook epitomized by Leonhardt, last month biologist Arijit Chakravarty told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “Not only is the pandemic very much not over, but by creating the impression that the pandemic is over in the face of rampant viral spread and continuing rapid viral evolution, we are essentially sticking our chin out and asking the virus to do its worst.”

Chakravarty, whose research team has continuously been proven correct in its pandemic projections, stated emphatically:

I can’t predict the outcome of the next wave. I can’t predict the outcome of the next five waves. But, at the rate that we are going, a prediction can be made with a high degree of certainty that something bad will happen

sooner than later along these lines. Keep this pandemic running for another five years, and you’ll face a debacle on a scale that you haven’t yet seen. That’s a given.

Throughout the pandemic, the *New York Times* has provided essential ideological justification for the American ruling class’s homicidal profits-over-lives policies and the destruction of public health. This began with Thomas Friedman’s infamous declaration that “the cure cannot be worse than the disease,” picked up by Trump as his “herd immunity” mantra. The baton was soon passed to Leonhardt, whose latest column is one of dozens filled with misinformation.

At the same time, the *Times*, the *Washington Post* and numerous other outlets gave credence to the Wuhan Lab Lie concocted by the fascist Steve Bannon in January 2020. This conspiracy theory, designed to deflect anger towards China for the US ruling elite’s policies that have killed well over 1.1 million Americans, was most recently given an antisemitic spin by Democratic presidential hopeful Robert Kennedy, Jr., which the *Times* and other media outlets have downplayed.

The International Committee of the Fourth International, which publishes the WSWS, is the only political party in the world that has continuously exposed every facet of pandemic propaganda and fought to unite the working class internationally to put an end to the pandemic. As the only genuine socialist movement, we stand for scientific truth, public health and the interests of the working class.

It is paramount that the international working class study the experiences of the pandemic, understand the ongoing dangers, and mobilize its collective strength to build a new society based on the principles of social equality and economic planning.



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