

School systems in the United States experience surge in COVID-19 and other illnesses as classes resume

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30 August 2023

As school systems across the United States return from summer vacation, COVID-19 is once again surging, leading to the temporary closure of some school systems in Texas and Kentucky. Cases will only continue to rise as more school systems, including New York City, open after Labor Day.

Last week in Kentucky, Lee County School District and Magoffin County Schools both closed due to large numbers of COVID-19 cases. In Magoffin County, attendance fell to 83 percent during the third week since returning from summer break, leading to the decision to switch to remote schooling at the end of last week.

“We’re seeing a lot of illness being reported consistent with COVID and influenza,” Scott Lockard, a public health director in Kentucky, told ABC News. “Lee County had a surge of cases and attendance dropped below the threshold needed to stay open, so they closed.”

Runge Independent School District in Texas, which has 195 students, closed from August 22–29 and canceled all extracurricular activities due to a sharp rise in COVID-19 among staff, with 10 out of the district’s 43 staff members testing positive as of August 21.

Hawaii, one of the few states to continue to report in some capacity on COVID cases among students and staff, has similarly seen a growing uptick in reported cases since schools reopened for students on August 7. In South Carolina, Richland School District Two canceled a pair of football games after players from a varsity and junior varsity high school team experienced a surge in cases.

According to infectious disease modeler J.P. Weiland, based on COVID-19 wastewater monitoring data from Biobot Analytics for the week ending August 24, there are currently about 580,000 new infections each day in the United States, with one in every 57 people currently infected. Although COVID cases have appeared to reach their summer peak, health experts warn that with schools opening the surge can continue into the fall and winter

months.

For the week ending August 19, the CDC reported that new hospitalizations for COVID-19 jumped 18.8 percent, with admissions having increased every week since June 24. Among adolescents aged 12 to 15, reports of COVID-19 emergency room visits nearly doubled from the week prior, reaching levels not seen in a year among this age group.

According to the CDC, deaths from COVID-19 in the United States for those aged 0–17 now stand at 2,305. COVID-19 is the leading cause of death in children caused by any infectious or respiratory disease, far outpacing the flu and pneumonia. Children, like the rest of the population, are also suffering from Long COVID in large numbers, with a July 2023 study published in *Pediatrics*, the journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics, finding that 16 percent of those infected experienced one or more persistent symptoms at least three months after infection.

A wide range of studies has also found that COVID-19 can cause long-term damage to nearly every organ in the body, including the brain, heart, lungs and kidneys. It has also been linked to diabetes and a range of cardiovascular events, from heart attacks to strokes. A September 2022 study from the *Journal of Medical Virology* found a 30 percent increase in heart attacks among people aged 25 to 44 during the first two years of the pandemic.

In the face of the latest surge in COVID-19, and the obvious dangers to the population from infection which remain, the Biden administration continues its policy of indifference. Not only have they not lifted a finger to protect schools and their communities against the ongoing flood of infections, neither have the promises to clean the air in these public spaces through infrastructure renovations been realized.

This is in keeping with Biden’s decision to end the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency in May, which eliminated the last vestiges of government assistance during the pandemic and forced the population to accustom itself to

coexisting with a rapidly mutating pathogen.

With the expiration of the public health emergency, tests, treatments and vaccines are no longer free or easily accessible and individuals are now left to the profit-seeking whims of insurance and pharmaceutical companies for these necessary measures. There is also currently no updated vaccine available to deal with the continuing evolution of the virus.

Biden's decision to let the disease run rampant, with no protections offered to the working class, is consistent with his approach to the pandemic since taking office and on par with the capitalist tenet that profits will always be prioritized over life and well-being.

Just a month into his tenure, without any scientific basis, he falsely told a second-grade student in a February 2021 CNN town hall, "You're not likely to be able to be exposed to something and spread it to mommy or daddy." In fact, study after study have pointed to the opposite.

One of the latest studies published in the *JAMA Network Open* in June showed that 70.4 percent of transmissions in a cohort of 166,170 households originated with a child. The study also noted the strong connection between in-person schooling and rises in within-household transmission.

"[W]e found that children represented the majority of index cases after schools reopened in both the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 school years. However, these transmissions decreased during summer and winter school breaks, which is consistent with prior studies showing school attendance associated with increased respiratory viral spread, and school holidays with decreased spread."

The teachers' unions likewise continue to play their pernicious role in facilitating the spread of COVID-19 in schools. The American Federation of Teachers last posted something on its website related to the pandemic in April, when it highlighted statements from its president, Randi Weingarten, to Congress in which she dishonestly claimed that "[O]pening schools safely—even as the pandemic surged—guided the AFT's every action."

In fact, Weingarten and the AFT systematically beat back opposition from rank-and-file teachers who opposed returning to unsafe schools. Most notoriously, in January 2022, at the height of the massive wave caused by the Omicron variant when millions were getting infected each day, the Chicago Teachers Union, affiliated with the AFT, forced teachers to return to work despite a vote by 73 percent of teachers to not return to unsafe schools after winter break.

Likewise, the AFT has not made any meaningful demands on the Biden administration or the Democratic-controlled Congress to allocate all necessary funds to make every public school safe for in-person learning, including through

upgrading HVAC systems, installing high-quality air purifiers in every classroom, and the installation of UV technology. Such technological upgrades would severely curtail the spread of COVID-19, if not eliminate it entirely.

Similarly, National Educators United (NEU), a pseudo-left pressure group within the AFT and the National Education Association, has remained almost completely silent on the pandemic since the Democrats took over the White House. Their one and only action on the pandemic since Biden became president occurred in late January 2021, when they launched a petition to keep schools open in the midst of the Omicron surge, only calling for mitigations such as testing and the use of high-quality masks.

More than two-and-a-half years later, with schools again opening in the midst of another COVID surge, NEU echoes the teachers' unions, President Biden and both political parties in ignoring the disease and its attendant dangers to teachers and students. Even calls for basic mitigation measures, such as the use of high-quality masks, contact tracing, and testing of potentially exposed students, have been dropped.

The effect of the bipartisan decision to let the virus rip, backed by the unions and pseudo-left groups like the NEU and the Democratic Socialists of America, is that large portions of the population have been misled into believing that the pandemic is over. With schools reopening and even the most minimal mitigations no longer in place, the stage is set for yet another completely avoidable wave of severe disease and death.

In contrast to the policies of the ruling class, supported by the unions and their hangers-on in the pseudo-left, the *World Socialist Web Site* has consistently called for taking all measures to stop the spread of the disease. Through the rational use of technology and common-sense public health policies that have been known for decades, COVID-19 can be brought under control and eliminated.

Capitalism, however, stands in the way of a rational solution. To end the pandemic once and for all, it is necessary for the international working class to take power out of the hands of a ruling class indifferent to their health and very survival and put in place policies based on collective human need, not the profit interests of the major corporations.



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