

# US Open tennis players “fall by the wayside” as COVID-19 surges

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*The pandemic can be stopped, but only through a mass movement of workers and scientists internationally. If you agree and want to join this struggle today, fill out the form at the bottom of this article.*

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This year’s US Open tennis tournament in New York City has been plagued by what is being euphemistically referred to as a “mysterious” illness in what, in fact, has all the hallmarks of a COVID-19 superspreader event. A number of top players have had to pull out of the tournament or have struggled to play due to COVID-like symptoms, including respiratory and gastrointestinal ailments.

The spate of tennis players getting sick takes place under conditions where the United States Tennis Association (USTA) and the US Open organizers have dismantled all anti-COVID safety measures in the midst of a new global surge of the pandemic. This is the first hidden surge of the pandemic since the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Biden administration ended their COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE) declarations in early May, which cleared the path for the scrapping of all pandemic surveillance and public health measures globally.

Currently, there is a growing wave of COVID-19 infections in New York and across the US, according to wastewater data, now the only available means of tracking infections. The latest data indicate that at present roughly 620,000 Americans are being infected with COVID-19 each day, with the Northeast region experiencing the greatest level of viral transmission. In recent weeks, COVID-19 hospitalizations have more than doubled in New York.

Densely packed crowds are attending the US Open tournament in the Queens neighborhood of Flushing, with six days left in the tournament. In a twisted manner, tennis players are being hailed for continuing to play while sick and praised as “warriors” if they somehow defeat their healthy opponents. The athletes are in close quarters in locker rooms and are interacting with fans without any protection.

With no testing or masking requirements, the US Open tournament has effectively become a COVID-19 superspreader event, and the tournament organizers are covering it up by brushing aside the cases as “food poisoning” or a “flu.” In fact,

the latest figures from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show that virtually no flu is being transmitted in most of the US, but what *is* spreading widely is SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

Epidemiologists have weighed in publicly about the US Open superspreader, including Michael Olesen, who bluntly stated, speaking of the spread of illness at the US Open: “I’m not sure why people are perplexed. It’s COVID. Hard stop.” David Staedson tweeted sarcastically, “As the latest variant of SARS-2 spreads around the world, a mysterious illness with the same symptoms as COVID-19 is spreading at the US Open.”

At the outset of the tournament, former tennis champion and ESPN sports commentator John McEnroe had to miss the event after testing positive for COVID-19. So far, this is the only official case of COVID-19 testing done on anyone at the tournament, with either a positive or negative result. USTA and event organizers have not even mentioned the word “COVID” or stated whether they have tested a single player for this or any other illness.

A week before the US Open began, McEnroe was part of a USTA exhibition event called “Stars of the Open,” where he played with a number of current tennis players, including Carlos Alcaraz, the world’s number one in men’s singles, and Christopher Eubanks, an American player who later suffered a serious gastrointestinal complaint.

A number of other international tennis players have since fallen ill. Tunisia’s top player and last year’s US Open women’s finalist Ons Jabeur has struggled to play in multiple matches with visible respiratory issues, including coughing bouts and breathing difficulties through the first three rounds of the tournament. In the middle of her first-round match against Camila Osario, she had to take a medical timeout.

“I’m a zombie because I have the flu,” said the 29-year-old player. While coughing and sniffing during on-court and press interviews, Jabeur has been praised as a “warrior” for playing very physically demanding tennis matches while sick. After struggling to beat Marie Bouzkova of Czechia, who herself suffered a significant groin injury during the match, Jabeur lost her next contest to unranked 20-year-old Qinwen Zheng of China.

Austrian player Dominic Thiem, a former top-three player,

was severely ill and had to pull out of his second-round match. Before his match against the young American Ben Shelton, Thiem reportedly threw up and felt terrible and has been suffering from gastrointestinal issues. Thiem was seen in severe pain and gagging as he sat on his bench during his match, before he had to finally retire. It is not clear if Thiem has been tested for COVID-19 or is potentially suffering from Long COVID after a previous infection, which he publicly announced in May of 2022.

Other athletes who got sick include Finnish player Emil Ruusuvuori, who pulled out before his first-round match against Russian player Andrey Rublev, citing an unspecified “sickness.” American Tennys Sandgren also fell ill after leaving the tournament. He tweeted, “I got the US Open bug,” without specifying if he was tested for COVID-19.

Christopher Eubanks got so sick during his match that he had to forfeit a game to French player Benjamin Bonzi in order to use the restroom. Polish tennis player Hubert Hurkacz called for a medical timeout during his second-round match, and one fan observed that he looked “pretty tired and ill.”

Despite the unprecedented number of players getting sick, the USTA and the tournament organizers have done nothing to reinstate COVID-19 testing measures or prevent the further spread of the virus among the players or the crowds. Tennis journalist Ben Rothenberg said on Twitter, “I can tell you people in the press room and players lounge are coughing and sniffing a lot!”

How many elite athletes, event staff and attendees will ultimately become sick? How many will go on to develop Long COVID or die prematurely from stroke, heart attack or other adverse events associated with COVID-19 infection?

With highly lucrative advertising and sports broadcasting revenues at stake, well over \$1 billion in total economic value, the event organizers could not care less. The health of the athletes, attendees and the wider population weighs little against the economic interests of the corporate bosses behind the sport. Enormous sums of money are at stake, with the US Open generating the most revenue of the four tennis “majors”—the national tournaments in Australia, France, Britain and the US. Last year, the US Open generated over half a billion in revenue, surpassing the \$472 million made by the British tournament held at Wimbledon.

The USTA’s uncaring recklessness is entirely in line with the Biden administration’s pro-corporate propaganda offensive aimed at falsely portraying the pandemic as over. For the ruling class, nothing can be allowed to come in the way of corporate profits, not even mass death, hospitalizations and the ongoing disabling of millions of people with Long COVID.

What is taking place at the US Open is a microcosm of the broader cover-up of the pandemic, as masses of people continue to die or become disabled globally every week. Last week, Dr. Anthony Fauci openly voiced the ruling class policies of social murder and eugenics by saying nonchalantly

that the vulnerable and elderly will “fall by the wayside.”

The growing number of tennis players “falling by the wayside” is a warning. If the latest upsurge of the virus has such an impact on athletes, mostly young and all in top physical condition, what can the broader population expect? And if the authorities and their media acolytes agree to say and do nothing at the heavily publicized US Open, what will they do as COVID-19 spreads more widely in the fall?

Coinciding with the tournament, tens of millions of children and educators have returned to poorly-ventilated schools across the US, where they face yet another round of widespread disease, debilitation and even death. The same goes for almost every workplace internationally, as workers are compelled to labor in unsafe and often deadly conditions.

Throughout the world, the vast majority of the population can no longer receive free or affordable COVID-19 testing. Treatments like Paxlovid and even vaccines will soon only be available at marked-up prices.

The spread of COVID-19 and the long-term implications for the world’s population are an indictment of the “forever COVID” policies of the ruling class in every country. According to *The Economist*, there have now been nearly 25 million excess deaths attributable to the pandemic globally, including over 1.4 million in the US. Hundreds of millions across the world are likely suffering from various problems associated with Long COVID, which are often debilitating.

With six days left, the US Open should be suspended to protect lives and stop the ongoing spread of the virus. All participants and workers in the tournament must be tested immediately, and a plan drawn up and implemented for contact tracing and treatment, including among the fans who attended.

More fundamentally, the criminal cover-up of the pandemic and the unchecked spread of COVID-19 must be opposed with a socialist public health program, in diametric opposition to the monstrosity unfolding at the US Open. What is required is a powerful mass movement of the international working class, in unity with public health workers and scientists, to force the implementation of a global elimination strategy to stop all human-to-human transmission of COVID-19 throughout the world.



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