

Hidden COVID wave starts to wane in US, with new variants around the corner

Benjamin Mateus
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The latest hidden wave of the COVID-19 pandemic that began in the United States in late June appears to have finally begun to ebb. According to Biot Analytics wastewater data, levels of SARS-CoV-2 are starting to decline throughout the US, with the Northeast lagging other regions of the country.

At present, however, infections remain near the peak reached during the week of August 30 to September 6, and viral transmission remains very high in each region. Infectious disease modeler JP Weiland estimating that current wastewater levels translate to more than 570,000 COVID infections each day. Based on his modeling, by the end of October the current wave will have likely infected more than 60 million Americans.

The virus is continuing to spread unhindered throughout the world, with wastewater data on the rise in Canada, Germany and other countries that still have such surveillance systems in place. At the same time, SARS-CoV-2 continue to evolve at a rapid clip, producing new variants and mutations all over the world.

The Omicron BA.2.86 subvariant (nicknamed “Pirola”) appears to have picked up an important escape mutation that has been seen in the FLip variants, including in the Omicron EG.5 subvariant (nicknames “Eris”), which is the most prevalent variant in the US and many other countries. In a recent report, Bloom Lab noted that Pirola’s affinity for ACE2 receptors is higher than BA.2 and XBB.1.5, writing, “Possibly this could impact transmissibility, and certainly could impact tolerance for future antibody escape mutations.”

The temporary decline in the COVID wave in the US is also evident in the hospitalization data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) COVID Data Tracker, which reports that hospitalizations for COVID-19 have declined slightly from their peak in the week ending on September 9, 2023, when 20,562 Americans were admitted for COVID-19.

Meanwhile, the official CDC figures for COVID deaths, the most lagging indicator, show that as of September 2, 2023, weekly deaths had reached 1,088 fatalities, up 2.3-fold from their lows on July 8, 2023. Given the lag associated with deaths, this figure may continue to climb throughout the month of September.

Unsurprisingly, amid the latest wave, even as COVID-19 deaths and excess deaths associated with COVID-19 were on the rise, the CDC announced last week that their website on provisional excess death counts for COVID-19 would be archived on September 27, 2023. The agency has taken great pains to quietly and in succession disappear virtually all meaningful data that the

population requires to protect themselves from the many dangers posed by COVID-19 infection and reinfection.

Among these dangers are Long COVID, estimated to be impacting over 20 million Americans and hundreds of millions of people globally, as well as damage to myriad organ systems.

On Thursday, a study was published by researchers at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), finding that SARS-CoV-2 infects and replicates in the coronary arteries regardless of the level of plaque they contain. This appears to explain why certain COVID-19 patients have a greater chance of developing cardiovascular disease or have more heart-related complications after their infection.

Regarding the mechanism behind these observations, the authors wrote:

SARS-CoV-2 induced a robust inflammatory response in cultured macrophages [human white blood cells] and human atherosclerotic vascular explants with secretin of cytokines known to trigger cardiovascular events. Our data establish that SARS-CoV-2 infects coronary vessels, inducing plaque inflammation that could trigger acute cardiovascular complications and increase the long-term cardiovascular risk.

Despite the best efforts of the entire political establishment and corporate media to ignore or downplay the recent wave of the pandemic, the reality of mass infection has had an impact on mass consciousness and behavior.

According to Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF), four in 10 adults have modified their behavior during the current wave, with a quarter of all Americans saying they are now more likely to mask in public, 22 percent planning to avoid large gatherings, 17 percent less likely to travel and 15 percent less likely to dine indoors at restaurants. Also, nearly half the population is considering getting the latest booster shot tailored to the Omicron XBB.1.5 subvariant.

Indeed, there is a healthy response within the population to such information which is at the heart of the issue for the ruling elites. The forever COVID policy is not just to allow a deadly pathogen to continue to infect *en masse* large swaths of the population every few months.

These healthy developments within the population are anathema

to the dominant views of the ruling class, for whom a globally-integrated public health infrastructure is seen as a threat to the functioning of commerce.

This anti-public health and anti-science approach is bound up with the accelerating phase of capitalism's death agony, in which delirium and delusions grip the consciousness of the ruling elites, increasingly aware that their days are numbered. This makes the situation for the working class all the more dangerous and requires they openly enter the class struggle ever more determined to seize control over mankind's productive forces.

When it comes to the COVID-19 pandemic and the prevention of future spillover events, capitalist leaders are gripped by a paralysis of will. Even with 28 million excess deaths in the first four years of the pandemic, the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response which met after the UN General Assembly concluded their meeting without any clear resolution. Their only agreement was to hold another session in 2026.

Speaking with the *Associated Press* after the meeting, former New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark commented, "I think it's fair to say that the declaration is a missed opportunity. It has many pages and paragraphs and only one firm commitment and that is to hold another high-level meeting in three years' time."

She explained that the ministers and political leaders speaking at the summit attempted to avoid drawing any comprehensive lessons from the devastation wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic. Noting the impact on rising extreme poverty, hunger, massive economic impacts borne by populations of the world, and the rising crisis of social inequality, Clark stated:

Many of them missed the point. Pandemics don't impact just health; they impact many different facets of people's lives, and government operations. It was clear that they should have been taking the overarching view. But they went down quite a narrow track to talk about health.

At the UN Meeting, Clark warned:

Viruses that can cause pandemics will not wait for diplomacy to produce results ... Ingenuity and human solidarity can make COVID-19 the last pandemic to cause such devastation. But all of it depends above all on the political choice of member states.

Beyond SARS-CoV-2, there remain many very deadly pathogens with pandemic potential that could spillover into human populations at any point, including the highly virulent H5N1 bird flu pandemic among multiple animal populations, the recent Nipah virus outbreak currently underway in Southern India, and more.

This week, former Chair of the UK Vaccine Taskforce, Kate Bingham, promoting her book co-authored with vaccine expert Tim Hames, warned that the world has grown too comfortable with COVID.

Let me put it this way: the 1918-19 flu pandemic killed at least 50 million people worldwide, twice as many as were killed in World War I. Today, we could expect a similar death toll from one of the many viruses that exist. Today, there are more viruses busily replicating and mutating than all the other life forms on our planet combined. Not all of them pose a threat to humans, of course – but plenty do.

Bingham then stated that in a sense, "we got lucky with COVID-19, despite the fact that it caused 20 million or more deaths across the world."

Recent modeling and historical analysis note that the threat of pandemics similar to or more deadly than COVID are no longer once-in-a-century dangers. A study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences in 2021 found the probability of a COVID-level event is now around 2 percent in any year. The study notes:

together with recent estimates of increasing rates of disease emergence from animal reservoirs associated with environmental change, this finding suggests a high probability of observing pandemics similar to COVID-19 (probability of experiencing it in one's lifetime currently about 38 percent), which may double in coming decades.

Even with discussions of the next pandemic taking place in various academic circles, the SARS-CoV-2 virus continues to mutate, acquiring new mutations as it infects hundreds of millions in short order throughout the globe. The evolution of the highly-mutated Pirola confirms the continuous warnings of the *World Socialist Web Site*, based on the work of numerous principled scientists from throughout the world, and underscores the urgent need for the international working class to fight for a global elimination strategy to stop the pandemic.



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