

# Thanksgiving travel fuels latest COVID-19 wave amid collapse of public health

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This week will see record travel across the United States, with over 5.3 million Americans flying and over 55 million driving at least 50 miles to visit family for Thanksgiving. Misled by the government and media, the vast majority of these people are unaware that their travel coincides with and will facilitate yet another wave of the COVID-19 pandemic across the US, as well as the spread of new, potentially more dangerous variants of SARS-CoV-2.

The latest wastewater COVID-19 surveillance data from Biobot Analytics show that rates of transmission have increased 28 percent across the US over the past month. Using these data, oncologist Dr. Mike Hoerger of Tulane University estimates that at present roughly 762,000 Americans are being infected with COVID-19 each day, with 5.3 million people now actively infectious. He forecasts that by Christmas there will be roughly 1.3 million daily new cases in the US, with 8.9 million infectious people.

Noting that there is "already more virus circulating today than during 60% of the days of the pandemic," Dr. Hoerger concludes, "we're clearly in the 8th US COVID wave."

Many European countries, including the Nordic and Baltic countries as well as Poland and the Czech Republic, have seen similar spikes in wastewater or test positivity rates.

The latest wave is being driven by the Omicron EG.5.1 subvariant (nicknamed "Eris" by variant trackers), as well as the HV.1 subvariant in the US and other descendants of the XBB recombinant variants globally.

At the same time, scientists are raising alarm over the growing global dominance of the Omicron BA.2.86 subvariant (nicknamed "Pirola"), and in particular its descendant JN.1. Over the past week, multiple variant trackers have called attention to the rapid rise of JN.1, which they predict will become dominant globally in the weeks and months ahead.

On November 17, leading variant tracker JP Weiland published a statement on BA.2.86 and JN.1, noting, "The emergence of BA.2.86 represents the largest evolutionary jump since the arrival of SARS-CoV-2 in 2019." Stating that JN.1 contains a mutation "that lab studies have shown significantly improves antibody escape over BA.2.86," he warned that "a change to symptom profile or severity cannot be ruled out." He concluded, "Additional mutations to JN.1 to further increase transmissibility are anticipated."

In other words, the highly immune-evasive JN.1 variant is

quickly becoming dominant, is expected to soon become even more transmissible, and could be more pathogenic than prior variants, which would only become evident after hospitals and morgues began filling up.

While official rates of death and hospitalization due to COVID-19 have declined in the US and globally over the past year, they remain stubbornly high, making clear that this virus is nothing like the flu or common cold.

Health care expert Gregory Travis recently noted that there were 5,305 official deaths from COVID-19 in October 2023 across the US, compared to 145 deaths from influenza in the same month, while over the past 12 months there have been a total of 85,200 official COVID-19 deaths.

According to Travis's tally of excess deaths from disease in the US during the pandemic, most of which are attributable to COVID-19, there have now been over 1.3 million excess deaths across the country, compared to roughly 1.15 million official COVID-19 deaths.

Globally, *The Economist* estimates that there have now been 27.4 million total excess deaths, roughly 4 times the official figure of 7 million, while at present there continue to be 5,240 excess deaths each day.

Beyond this monumental mortality burden—which has left in its wake hundreds of millions of grieving loved ones—the pandemic has also unleashed the greatest scale of time-concentrated morbidity in human history. The "mass disabling event" associated with prolonged symptoms known as Long COVID, which can impact the brain, heart, lungs, kidneys and virtually every other organ in the body, is ongoing and expanding with each new wave of infection. Hundreds of millions of people are now believed to be suffering from symptomatic Long COVID globally.

In a recent interview with the *World Socialist Web Site*, immunologist Dr. Amy Proal, one of the world's leading experts on Long COVID, reviewed the scientific findings on viral persistence, which show that SARS-CoV-2 can persist in myriad body tissues, including in asymptomatic infections. Summing up and denouncing the present pandemic policy, she stated:

We're seeding children from a young age with viral RNA in their tissues, with a virus that people are getting multiple times a year as it continues to mutate, and we do, as you mentioned, see that reinfection seems to up the

chance of developing chronic symptoms. It's absolutely unsustainable and a complete crisis.

All of this objective reality of the pandemic has been deliberately covered up, minimized and distorted by every capitalist government and corporate media outlet in the world, who have instead promoted disinformation to lull the population into believing that COVID-19 is now harmless and the pandemic is over.

This propaganda campaign has been spearheaded by the Biden administration in the US, with Biden stating bluntly in September 2022 that “the pandemic is over.” In May 2023, Biden lifted the COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE) declaration, leading to the total dismantling of pandemic surveillance systems across the US.

Not only is the pandemic ongoing, but the very policy of abandoning mitigations and surrendering to the coronavirus is accelerating the pace of viral evolution, thereby heightening the danger that the pandemic could take a far deadlier turn in the months and years ahead.

The response of the capitalist ruling class to the pandemic amounts to a massive and unprecedented social crime. The encouragement of mass infection with a novel, neurotropic virus signifies a fundamental turning point in modern history, in which the ruling elites have declared open war on the working class and society as a whole. Clawing back all the social gains won by workers in over a century of struggle, they are ruthlessly placing profits above the most minimal public health measures.

Commenting on this vast social retrogression during the pandemic, a group of principled scientists known as the John Snow Project—which includes Drs. Proal, Satoshi Akima, Christos Argyropoulos, David Berger, Małgorzata Gasperowicz, Lidia Morawska and others—noted recently:

The unofficial alliance between big business and dangerous pathogens that was forged in early 2020 has emerged victorious and greatly strengthened from its battle against public health, and is poised to steamroll whatever meager opposition remains for the remainder of this, and future pandemics.

A major force in forging this “unofficial alliance” was the *New York Times*, whose writer Thomas Friedman coined the ruling elites’ mantra in March 2020, “the cure cannot be worse than the disease,” by which he meant public health could not be allowed to impinge on private profit. The *Times* continuously denounced China’s Zero-COVID elimination policy, which saved millions of lives in the first three years of the pandemic.

In a piece published Tuesday, the *Times* revived these slanders, stating:

China managed to hold back the waves with its “zero

Covid” policy, but protests against its brutality grew so intense that President Xi Jinping dropped it abruptly in November 2022. The floodgates opened: Within a few weeks, more than a billion Chinese people contracted Omicron, resulting in over a million deaths.

With these statements, the *Times* states explicitly that taking measures to stop the spread of COVID-19 was brutal, whereas accepting millions of deaths was normal. The implications are far-reaching and speak to the incredible indifference to human life now pervading ruling circles.

The same ruling class that has imposed policies resulting in the needless death from COVID-19 of over 1.3 million Americans is directly responsible for the death of over 400,000 Ukrainian youth in the brutal US-NATO proxy war against Russia, as well as Israel’s genocidal war against Gaza, which has now killed over 14,000 civilians, mostly women and children.

While funneling over \$100 billion in American-made bombs, missiles, tanks, drones and other military hardware to the far-right governments of Ukraine and Israel, the Biden administration has cut off all pandemic funding and financial assistance, with over 10 million Americans losing access to Medicaid and millions more relying on food pantries to survive this winter.

The homicidal response of the American ruling class to the pandemic, preceded by decades of imperialist war and ever-deepening social inequality, produced a profound but as yet unconscious radicalization within the American and international working class. These built-up social tensions have now erupted to the surface in response to the genocide in Gaza, which has triggered perhaps the largest global anti-war movement in history.

It is critical that this growing mass movement be led in an anti-capitalist and socialist direction, an essential component of which will be the fight for a vast expansion of public health throughout the world.

In its article, the John Snow Project notes that an elimination strategy to stop the pandemic globally is now more viable than ever before. By deploying all available public health measures, the Project stresses, “Any country that has the necessary resources (or is provided with them) can achieve full containment within a few months.”

The only political tendency fighting for this global elimination strategy, and for a revolutionary socialist program to stop the descent into barbarism and World War III, is the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and its national sections, the Socialist Equality Parties (SEPs). The essential task is to build this party as the vanguard of the working class and prepare for the revolutionary struggles ahead.



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