

New COVID-19 surge driven by KP.2 and KP.3 variants

Bill Shaw
28 June 2024

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to sicken millions of people, with a growing surge driven by the newly evolved KP.2 and KP.3 variants of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The surge impacts multiple countries, including the US, Australia and the UK.

In Australia, COVID is surging along with two winter respiratory viruses, influenza and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). Surveillance data show increases in the numbers of COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, nursing home outbreaks, and healthcare provider absences due to illness, as well as increased levels of the virus in wastewater.

In the United Kingdom, hospitalizations due to COVID-19 are up 24 percent in the past week. In addition, the percentage of COVID-19 tests that are positive has risen from 8.4 to 10 percent.

According to Professor Lawrence Young, a virologist at Warwick University, “This is a wakeup call. The virus hasn’t gone away and is certainly not a seasonal infection.”

In the United States, there are 15 states seeing high or very high levels of the virus in sewage, according to the CDC. The CDC maintains a map of current virus levels, shown below, which it updates on a regular basis.

The 15 states are concentrated mostly in the Southern and Western US and include the nation’s three most populous states: California, Texas and Florida. In California, the surge comes earlier than experts anticipated, with current cases of COVID-19 already nearing last summer’s peak. California’s percentage of COVID-19 tests that are positive is 7.7 percent, exceeding the national average of 6.6 percent.

With COVID-19 surging in California, Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass proposed banning the wearing of masks. This follows proposed mask bans in New York

and the passage of this reactionary measure in North Carolina.

The mask bans have nothing to do with their stated purpose of “public safety,” but instead are retaliatory measures aimed at suppressing widespread demonstrations against the genocide in Gaza. Their goal is to intimidate protestors by stripping them of anonymity. Indeed, the proposed mask ban in New York is broadly supported by several Zionist groups.

A few days after proposing the mask ban in LA, Mayor Bass herself contracted COVID-19. Her office announced that she will be working remotely, something denied to the vast majority of American workers.

In Hawaii, there are very high levels of the virus in sewage, and there is a statewide average test positivity rate of 16.7 percent. The city of Honolulu has an even higher test positivity rate at 20.1 percent. The number of hospitalizations for COVID-19 in Hawaii, 126 per week, is the highest level in the state since last August. In response to the surge, Kaiser Permanente and other healthcare systems in Hawaii have resumed masking requirements for all healthcare providers and staff.

The surge in Hawaii coincides with a major event held on the island of Oahu from June 6 to 16. FestPAC is the largest celebration of indigenous Pacific Islanders. Ironically, it had been postponed from 2020 due to the onset of the pandemic. Over 500,000 people from 28 island nations converged on the small island for the 10-day event.

Given the confluence of the event and the emergence of the new viral variants, which have been shown to escape existing immunity, it was a recipe for widespread transmission of the virus. The test positivity rate among festival attendees during the event was 13 percent. The state department of health offered testing

and N95 masks to attendees.

Texas and Florida, despite having high and very high levels of the virus in wastewater, have test positivity rates of 5.5 and 4.1 percent respectively, below the national average. However, these states have been at the forefront nationally of dismantling their public health infrastructure, especially as it relates to COVID-19. Thus, the stark contrast between their wastewater levels of virus and other traditional public health metrics is to be expected when the virus is spreading uncontrolled in their regions.

This COVID-19 surge is driven by the emergence of two new viral variants called KP.2 and KP.3. At the end of March, these two variants made up less than 4 percent of cases in the US. Per the most recent data on June 22, they together are projected to make up 53.9 percent of cases, with KP.3 comprising 33.1 percent of cases, while KP.2 comprises 20.8 percent. Over the same time period, the previously dominant JN.1 variant dropped from 52.9 percent of cases to a projected 1.6 percent of cases.

In the United Kingdom, KP.2 and KP.3 currently make up 22 and 44 percent of cases, respectively. In New South Wales, Australia, KP.2 and KP.3 together make up over half of cases.

Early data have shown that immunity to previous variants provides less protection against KP.2 and KP.3. A new preprint which is undergoing peer review confirms early analysis of the new variants. Namely, antibodies developed by either vaccination against, or infection with, previous viral variants do not “neutralize” the new viral variants as effectively as they do prior variants. Neutralization means the antibodies bind to the virus in such a way as to prevent it from infecting cells.

Thus, the spread of these new variants is occurring because they “escape” pre-existing immunity. This phenomenon is typical of viruses that are not eradicated: They continue to evolve into new forms to overcome pre-existing immunity in their host populations.

The emergence of the new viral variants and the consequent surge of COVID-19 that is currently underway has been enabled by a ruling class indifferent to the suffering caused by the virus. To push their genocidal agenda, the ruling class is further destroying what little protections individuals have available to

them by imposing cruel mask bans that disproportionately impact society’s vulnerable elderly and immunocompromised people.

To eradicate SARS-CoV-2 and thus prevent newer, potentially more dangerous variants of the virus with associated surges in disease and death, the working class must overthrow capitalism and reorganize society on the basis of human need instead of private profit.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)