

Money over lives: The tragic case of Noah Lyles' collapse at the Paris Olympics

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The horrific collapse of American sprinter Noah Lyles at the Paris Olympics due to his infection with COVID-19 has shocked masses of people throughout the world. While downplayed by the media, this event graphically exposes the reality that the pandemic is ongoing and remains dangerous for the entire population.

Before the race, Lyles was expected to win gold and possibly set a new world record in the 200m sprint, after he had just won the 100m race two days earlier. But shortly after crossing the finish line in third, Lyles fell down, writhing on the ground and visibly struggling to breathe. He then got on one knee for nearly 30 seconds before medical professionals assisted him off the track in a makeshift wheelchair in front of a stunned global audience of millions.

Lyles returned a few minutes later wearing a mask and revealed that he had been sick with COVID for the previous two days, telling a reporter, "I woke up early, about 5am on Tuesday, and I was feeling really horrible." He later added, "I was quite light headed after that race and the shortness of breath and chest pain [were] definitely active." He soon announced on Twitter/X that he would not take part in his final event the next day.

This disturbing episode has upended the lies of Joe Biden and other world leaders that "the pandemic is over." In fact, COVID-19 is spreading like wildfire with no mitigations in place to protect public health. On Friday, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) updated its wastewater data, showing that over one million Americans are now being infected with COVID-19 each day.

The onset of the pandemic forced the suspension of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics to the following year, when testing, masking and other precautions were put in place. In 2022, the Beijing Olympics were held in a highly secure bubble set up in line with the Zero-COVID strategy then in place in China, protecting all athletes at

the event.

All of this is now over. The Paris Olympics take place over a year after the World Health Organization (WHO) lifted the COVID-19 public health emergency declaration, and every world government has scrapped all mitigations to slow the spread of COVID-19.

What was once referred to as the "Olympic spirit" is effectively a dead letter. As with all modern sporting events, a tremendous amount of money is at stake in the Olympics for the athletes, their corporate sponsors, and the event organizers. Combined with the toxic promotion of nationalism, enormous pressures are now placed upon athletes to compete with COVID, regardless of the dangers posed to themselves and others.

Those who organized the Paris Olympics were well aware that a horrific event like Lyles' collapse would happen, but proceeded with reckless abandon anyway. Summing up the callous disregard for the health of athletes, United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee CEO Sarah Hirshland stated, "We know not everybody is going to make it through the games healthy."

Indeed, the Paris Olympics has quickly become a super-spreader event. Some 11,000 athletes and millions of mask-less fans have traveled to the French capital from throughout the world, creating a metropolitan petri dish of different SARS-CoV-2 variants. Lyles is one of nearly 50 athletes with confirmed COVID infections, with the real toll undoubtedly far higher.

The fact that the fastest man alive was struck down and required medical assistance underscores that COVID-19 remains a significant health risk to everyone throughout the world. It is a damning exposure of all the propaganda portraying COVID-19 as "mild" and comparable to the flu or common cold.

Lyles has suffered from asthma his entire life and is therefore at greater risk of developing a severe infection

and potentially Long COVID. This has gone unreported in the corporate media. In fact, he is lucky to be alive, as strenuous exercise while sick with COVID—especially when suffering from asthma—places one at elevated risk of respiratory failure or cardiac arrest.

Other Olympians who have tested positive for COVID have had similar awful bouts. Commenting on his own infection, British swimmer Adam Peaty stated that

since contracting COVID last week, it's just every day waking up with a different thing. It's probably the worst week of my life in terms of my body, and that's no exaggeration.

Like Lyles, German long jumper Malaika Mihambo had to be carried off the track in a wheelchair after she suffered a terrible cough. The only difference is that Mihambo's COVID infection was two months ago, indicating that her lingering cough is a symptom of Long COVID.

Other Olympians, including American Samoan sprinter Nathan Crumpton and former British rower Oonagh Cousins, have been completely sidelined due to Long COVID.

A 2024 study on German elite athletes and a 2023 survey of elite swimmers noted that COVID hampered their performance in the first few weeks after infection, with symptoms like headaches, cough, fever and sore throat. Roughly 10 percent of the athletes developed prolonged difficulties with concentration and drops in their performance.

The response of the media and officials to Lyles' collapse and the revelation that he has COVID is nothing short of criminal. Stating that he was simply "following protocols," not a single journalist has questioned the validity of these protocols. Instead, they encourage people to take incredible risks, jeopardizing their own health and that of countless others.

This same criminality pervades the entire capitalist response to the pandemic, which has subordinated public health to private profit. There is almost a complete blackout in the bourgeois media of the real state of the pandemic, with barely a word written or said about the deepening global wave of infections and the mounting societal toll of Long COVID.

Capitalist governments throughout the world have imposed the "forever COVID" policy on global society,

in which everyone will be subjected to reinfections with COVID-19 at least once per year, *ad infinitum*.

Multiple studies have proven that each reinfection compounds one's chances of developing symptomatic Long COVID, while even asymptomatic infections can cause long-term damage to the body, predisposing one to heart attack, diabetes, neurological disorders and more.

This insane social policy has to stop! There must be a renewal of a determined, scientific campaign to save lives and protect the health of the population.

Scientific methods exist to stop the pandemic by ensuring that every indoor public space is retrofitted with HEPA filters, Far-UVC technology, carbon dioxide monitors, and other measures to stop the spread of COVID-19. But the resources needed to carry out this global elimination strategy are being hoarded by a tiny financial oligarchy which is hostile to the working class.

The collapse of Noah Lyles is a highly visible manifestation of the basic, horrifying truth that human lives are being sacrificed to corporate interests. There is a profound connection between this Olympic athlete collapsing in a sporting event and a worker who suffers a post-COVID heart attack in a factory or a teacher who gets sick in a classroom. Every day, workers are sent into life-threatening conditions to maintain capitalist production and the flow of profits.

The fight against the pandemic will only be advanced to the extent that the international working class is informed of the dangers it confronts and made aware of the science of the pandemic more broadly, including what must be done to eliminate the virus globally. This fight for a socialist public health program is a critical component of the building of a socialist movement in the working class, the only means of stopping the modern descent into capitalist barbarism.



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