

Pediatric flu deaths jump to 68, with 11 children dying in the last reported week alone amid media blackout

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The latest influenza data from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), for the week ending February 8, shows an increase in flu-associated mortality which has already claimed 13,000 lives this season. Particularly troubling are 11 flu deaths in children in the week between February 2-8 alone, bringing the total pediatric flu deaths this season to 68.

All indicators point to the likelihood that the ongoing 2024-2025 flu season will surpass recent years' figures for both pediatric and adult flu deaths in the United States.

This past week the CDC indicated that it was updating the classification of the season to "high severity" for all age-groups for the first time since the 2017-18 season. Every state is reporting significant increases in influenza hospitalizations. Dr. John Swartzberg, clinical professor emeritus at the UC Berkeley School of Public Health told the California based *Mercury News*, "This may become the worst influenza season we've had so far in the 21st century," with infection reporting data showing that patients are presenting evenly with both H3N2, subtypes of influenza A and H1N1.

- For the first time since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic began, influenza is causing more deaths in **California** than the coronavirus, according to the state's Department of Public Health with a total of 751 confirmed flu deaths in the state. Eleven of those are of children, with San Diego County alone reporting four deaths. The ages of the children were 14, 15, 16, and 17 years old and officials confirmed that none of them had received their influenza vaccine.

- **Michigan, Wisconsin, North Carolina, and Virginia** are each reporting two children have died in each state. In Virginia one child between the ages of 5 and 12, and the other was between 13 and 17.

- One child in **Kentucky** was reported having died, no further information was given but officials confirmed that the child had not received a flu vaccine this season.

- Five children have died so far according to the latest data from the Texas Department of State Health Services. Only two media outlets have reported the five deaths.

These figures represent only what is being reported in the media and comprise less than half of the total pediatric deaths, pointing to a government and media blackout of critical public health information. Florida's Weekly Flu Review for the week ending February 8, 2025, makes reference to pediatric flu deaths this season, but the agency does not specific give a specific number.

Schools have also been shut down in a number of states as large percentages of students, staff, and teachers have been out sick. These include schools in Texas, where at least three districts closed schools, as well as in Ohio, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, Virginia, Oklahoma, Iowa and Missouri.

The greatest contributing factor to the high levels of sickness is the decline in the percentage of children receiving the annual flu vaccine since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Flu vaccination rates were highest for the 2019- 2020 flu season that ran October 2019 through May 2020 when 63.7 percent of children received at least one dose of the vaccine. According to WebMD and figures from the CDC, as of December 2024, only 37 percent of children had received flu shots, down from 44 percent at the same time the previous year.

This means that more than 40 percent fewer children are receiving the influenza vaccine than were five years ago. This staggering figure suggests that since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the anti-vaccination campaigns led by the far right and anti-science hacks such as Health and Human Services secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. have had a significant and detrimental effect on the wider population.

According to the CDC, there have so far been at least 29 million people infected with influenza, resulting in 370,000 hospitalizations and 16,000 deaths. The best way to prevent

severe illness and death is vaccination. The CDC estimates that in 2023, influenza vaccination prevented approximately 6 million illnesses, 65,000 hospitalizations, and 3,700 deaths.

A 2022 study published by the Infectious Disease Society of America and cited by the CDC showed that “flu vaccination reduced children’s risk of severe life-threatening influenza by 75%.” Furthermore, in a significant and recent study published in JAMA this past December, by a team led by Dr. Kelsey M. Sumner, showed that in a review of nearly 16,000 children in the US from 2015 to 2020, the children who received at least one influenza vaccine dose were associated with a 50 percent reduction in severe influenza-related outcomes in pediatric patients.

Just one day before the latest flu figures were released, Kennedy was confirmed as US president Donald Trump’s health secretary, representing an escalated attack on public health and science. Kennedy, notorious for spreading anti-vaccine disinformation, played a central role in stoking up vaccine hesitancy in the Samoan population months before a 2019 measles outbreak claimed the lives of 83 children.

Among the critical public health agencies that Kennedy will oversee under HHS are the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the CDC, the very agencies currently reporting on weekly infection rates for the flu and a wide number of other viruses and diseases.

On Friday when the latest flu deaths were published, Kennedy announced the firing of 5,200 HHS employees or six percent of its workforce including 1,300 CDC workers and 1165 at the NIH. A number of the CDC’s webpages have suspended, including their weekly publication, *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)*.

Kennedy has pledged to “give infectious disease a break for about eight years,” essentially promising that he and the Trump administration will ensure that all reporting and monitoring of viral and infectious diseases are halted and censored, denying the public the right to know about viral spread. Under such dictatorial measures vaccinations and access to vaccines will further plummet as one component of a broader attack on public health.

Despite the alarming rise in flu deaths, there is no national campaign to raise vaccination rates for children or the broader population, nor will there be until the working class enters onto the scene and begins waging a broader political fight to wrestle control of these critical questions out of the hands of the financial oligarchy.

Scientific achievements have advanced to a high degree from the initial recorded influenza cases in the 16th century to the 1918 influenza pandemic that infected more than 500 million across the globe and killed over 50 million. Air quality researchers now understand that influenza is an

airborne virus, spread primarily by breathing infected particles in shared unventilated air in indoor or crowded spaces.

Dr. Donald Milton, professor of environmental health, and his research team at the University of Maryland School of Public Health’s watershed study from 2012-2013, found that participants infected with the flu contaminated the air around them just by breathing. The conclusions from the study prove that the most commonly suggested measures such as handwashing, surface cleaning, and covering coughs and sneezes, were insufficient at preventing the spread of influenza.

These facts, so critical to a scientific understanding of the rapid spread of the SARS-2 virus which causes COVID-19, were widely and purposefully ignored in place of the “large-droplet” theory and six-foot distancing measures that were employed to get money flowing for Wall Street and corporations in the push to reopen schools and businesses in 2021.

The *World Socialist Web Site* made the critical observation that the disappearance of influenza in the 2020-21 season—when limited mitigation measures were widely implemented—proved that the eradication of SARS-CoV-2 and more is possible and that contrary to claims by the capitalist supporters of mass infection, that there is no disease or virus that humanity must “live with.”

The logical conclusions based on the highest understanding of viral transmission points directly to a broader fight for ventilation and clean air. Hand in hand with critical tools such as vaccinations, the deaths the population is told it must accept, are largely preventable.

Adding to the situation is the growing threat of an H5N1 “bird flu” pandemic, including the more dangerous D.1 variant which has infected humans, a measles outbreak in Texas, an ongoing tuberculosis outbreak in Kansas, the continued spread of COVID-19, RSV, and the guarantee of future pandemics with the continued subordination of public health to profit interests.

The question at hand is which social force will get to decide, the ruling oligarchy which is hostile to science and public health, or the working class which can carry out the socialist reorganization of society to ensure the highest scientific achievements are employed to raise public health, life expectancy and living standards to new heights which are incompatible with capitalism.



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