

DHS cover-up continues as outbreak spreads at Florida Everglades concentration camp

Jacob Crosse
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The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS), in league with the Florida state government, is engaged in a cover-up of the near-death of Venezuelan detainee Luis Manuel Rivas Velásquez and an ongoing viral outbreak at the Florida Everglades “Alligator Alcatraz” concentration camp. Federal and state authorities are refusing to acknowledge the spread of illness inside the remote facility, or provide adequate medical care to the hundreds of people detained there.

The government is deliberately confining immigrants, the vast majority of whom have not been convicted of a crime, in facilities where adverse health outcomes, including death, are inevitable. Including the alleged suicide of Chaofeng Ge, 32, in Pennsylvania last week, at least 12 people have died in ICE custody in 2025. According to the *New York Times*, more than 60,000 people are currently imprisoned in ICE facilities—by far the most in decades.

In an interview with the *Guardian*, Eric Lee, one of Rivas Velásquez’s attorneys, confirmed the horrific conditions at Alligator Alcatraz.

Based on what multiple detainees have told me, in the last 72 to 100 hours, there is some respiratory disease which has made the majority, or I would even say vast majority, of detainees sick in some form. There are people who are losing breath. There are people who are walking around coughing on one another. Their requests for masks from the guards are denied, and they only are allowed to shower once or maybe twice a week.

In a phone call with his client, Lee confirmed that

Rivas Velásquez was denied medical care for 48 hours before he collapsed on Tuesday. While fellow detainees, including a nurse from Cuba, performed CPR on Rivas Velásquez, staff on site offered no medical support. According to multiple witnesses Rivas Velásquez was left to lie on the floor for approximately 30 minutes before emergency personnel arrived.

Lee described the concentration camp as a “petri dish for disease.”

For nearly two days, friends, family and lawyers for Rivas Velásquez did not know if he was alive or dead. DHS officials refused to confirm that a medical emergency had occurred, and only late on Wednesday night released a statement falsely claiming that Rivas Velásquez had simply “fainted.”

Roughly 48 hours after he was hospitalized, Rivas Velásquez was returned to Alligator Alcatraz, where the guards refused his request for medical records. Lee told the *Guardian* that, in apparent retaliation for Rivas Velásquez speaking out against the inhumane conditions that nearly killed him, “The guards came to his bed, opened his pillow, took all the poetry and letters he’d been writing and all the notes he’d been taking about his experiences, and told him he’s no longer allowed to write.”

As the WSWS reported Sunday, Lee confirmed to the *Guardian* that his client was secretly transferred on Saturday to a detention facility in El Paso, Texas. Lee has been able to speak to his client only once since the transfer. During that call, Rivas Velásquez said he was being denied medical care and that he thought he was going to die. An emergency medical team in El Paso was dispatched to the detention center but was blocked from entering by ICE agents.

The government has denied there is any outbreak at

the Florida facility. On July 14, *Miami New Times* journalists began contacting the Florida Department of Health (FDH) about possible COVID-19 cases at Alligator Alcatraz after reports emerged of detainees falling ill.

Despite six calls and emails, the FDH did not respond until July 22, when press secretary Isabel Kilman replied to the *New Times* that the Florida Division of Emergency Management (FDEM) would handle all media inquiries. Repeated follow-up requests by *New Times* reporters to FDEM spokesperson Stephanie Hartman were ignored until August 8—after Rivas Velásquez had been hospitalized.

Hartman then falsely claimed that reports of a “serious illness” were “false,” and insisted, “Detainees have access to a 24/7, fully staffed medical facility with a pharmacy on site.” She has refused to answer any further questions, including those about the spread of COVID-19 inside the camp.

The refusal to test for or treat COVID-19 inside Alligator Alcatraz, and in immigrant and prison facilities across the United States, mirrors the broader attack on public health for the entire working class. From factories to schools, from hospitals to nursing homes, infections are allowed to spread unchecked, with predictable and deadly results.

This policy is bipartisan. While Trump first called for the US to stop testing for COVID-19 in 2020, it was under the Biden administration that all public health measures aimed at stopping the spread of the virus were dismantled. The Democrats fully embraced Trump’s “herd immunity” program, which has already claimed the lives of over 1.2 million Americans. When factoring in excess mortality, the total pandemic-related death toll is estimated at over 2 million. The Centers for Disease Control now estimates the virus is “growing or likely growing” in 45 out of 50 states, including Florida, with no measures in place to halt transmission.

Emboldened by the Democrats’ adoption of his anti-public health and anti-immigrant agenda, Trump is intensifying his attacks on the working class. His anti-science HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. has cut \$500 million in mRNA vaccine grants, and his relentless vilification of public health officials helped incite the recent armed attack on CDC headquarters in Atlanta, which left one police officer and the anti-vaccine gunman dead.

The reconciliation package passed earlier this year codified Trump’s 2017 tax cuts for the ultra-wealthy and Fortune 500 companies, while cutting \$800 billion from Medicaid. At the same time, it handed the immigration Gestapo a massive budget increase—\$75 billion in new funding for ICE over fiscal years 2025–29. These policies make clear the priorities of the ruling class: endless resources for repression, and nothing for healthcare, housing or basic human needs.



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