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World coronavirus cases to soar past 50 million

On Saturday, the number of confirmed global cases of the coronavirus pandemic will rocket past the grim milestone of 50 million. One in every 156 people on the planet have so far caught the disease, with no end in sight. Of those who contracted it, over 1.2 million have lost their lives to the deadly contagion, including more than 9,000 on Friday alone.

It was just over two months ago that the world witnessed its 25 millionth case, on August 28. Daily new cases regularly exceed 500,000 and are well on their way to three-quarters of a million. New deaths have exceeded their April highs despite the advances made in treating COVID-19 these past 10 months, a further indication of how entrenched the pandemic has become.



Healthcare workers move a COVID-19 patient to the Motol hospital in Prague, Czech Republic, November 6, 2020 [Credit: AP Photo/Petr David Josek]

Such figures are only a prelude of what is to come. If these trends are allowed to continue, there may be 100 million cases by the end of the year, surging at a rate of 1 million cases each day. As Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, recently told the *Washington Post*, "It's not a good situation. All the stars are aligned in the wrong place as you go into the fall and winter season, with people congregating at home indoors. You could not possibly be positioned more poorly."

One of the sharpest dangers is that hospitals become too overwhelmed to treat all of their patients. This is already taking place in El Paso, Texas and in various locations across

Europe. As was witnessed in Wuhan, China; Lombardy, Italy and, to a lesser extent, New York City in the early days of the pandemic, the death rate skyrockets when there are not enough supplies and medical personnel to properly treat every patient. While the rate of new deaths to new cases is currently at just above one percent, it is likely that this number will spike if the coronavirus continues its essentially uncontrolled spread.

The United States alone has recorded more than 10 million instances of infection, along with 242,000 deaths. The state of Texas surpassed the 1 million mark on Friday, placing it after the nation of Colombia as the tenth most infected region in the world. It is closely followed by California, which has more than 960,000 cases. Combined, they have over 37,000 deaths, more than all but eight other countries (excluding the US as a whole).

Amid such calamitous numbers in the US and internationally, President Donald Trump's fascistic former adviser Steve Bannon called for Dr. Fauci's beheading. During his podcast Thursday, which has since been taken down by Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, Bannon declared that Trump should start his second term by "firing Wray, firing Fauci." ("Wray" refers to FBI Director Christopher Wray).



President Donald Trump's former chief strategist Steve Bannon leaves federal court, Thursday, Aug. 20, 2020, after pleading not guilty to charges that he ripped off donors to an online fundraising scheme to build a southern border wall. (AP Photo/Craig Ruttle)

He continued, in medieval fashion, "I'd actually like to go back to the old times of Tudor England. I'd put their heads on pikes, right, I'd put them at the two corners of the White House as a warning to federal bureaucrats, you either get with the program or you're gone."

Fauci is widely recognized as one of the foremost authorities on infectious diseases, who rose to national prominence in the 1980s for his work combating the HIV/AIDS outbreaks in the United States. He has increasingly come under right-wing attack over the past several weeks for his criticisms of Trump's policy, or rather lack thereof, in handling the pandemic, in the lead-up to the presidential election.

In particular, Fauci recently advocated a nationwide mask mandate in the face of surging cases. At the time, there were 8.8 million cases in the US, more than 1 million fewer than now. This sparked another round of calls on Twitter by right-wing figures such as Alex Jones to "fire Fauci," and similar chants at Trump's in-person rallies. Trump himself has called Fauci a "disaster," and other leading medical officials "idiots," for suggesting even basic measures to combat and contain the deadly pandemic.

The necessity of both basic and far-reaching actions to end the ongoing surge in coronavirus infections was highlighted in a recent study published in the *Lancet*, showing that the rate at which the disease spreads increases by an average of 24 percent when schools reopen. The

research, led by You Li at the University of Edinburgh, also noted that the only other increase more significant occurred after bans on in-person gatherings, including in workplaces, were lifted.

The study used reopening data from 131 countries, including the United States and several countries in Western Europe. It found that “following the relaxation of school closure, bans on public events, bans on public gatherings of more than ten people, requirements to stay at home, and internal movement limits,” new cases increased consistent with models of how the coronavirus spreads when there are no such restrictions, peaking four weeks after restrictions are lifted. While they did not comment on the rate of deaths in the wake of rising cases, that is known to rise two to four weeks after infections increase.

Conversely, the researchers found that broad restrictions on mobility, including banning public events, closing down workplaces, shutting down schools and general stay-at-home orders, reduced COVID-19 transmission by an average of 52 percent within four weeks. The reduction in transmission is even more pronounced when combined with other public health measures, including robust coronavirus testing, contact tracing and isolation of infected individuals.

A further threat from the pandemic was highlighted in Denmark this past week. Danish health authorities reported that 12 people had been infected with a mutated strain of coronavirus that came from the country’s 17 million-strong mink population. In response, Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen ordered all mink killed in an effort to stop the spread of a new strain of the pandemic virus.

“Due to the discovery of a mutated infection in mink, which weakens the ability to form antibodies, resolute action is needed,” Frederiksen said on Wednesday. She continued, “The mutated virus carries the risk that a future vaccine will not work as it should.” These comments were echoed by Kaare Molbak, Denmark’s top epidemiologist, who warned that in the “worst-case scenario, the pandemic will restart, this time in Denmark.”

That such a possibility is even posed speaks to the inability of the current social order to deal with the pandemic. It is an unanswerable indictment of capitalism that the worst outbreaks of the pandemic have occurred in the most “advanced” capitalist countries, supposedly with the most resources to fight the disease.

Instead, their ruling elites have closed ranks to protect the profits of banks and corporations, not human lives. Such actions make clear that the solution to the coronavirus pandemic will not merely be medical and scientific, but political, as the working class fights to overthrow this outmoded and disastrous system and replace it with socialism.

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