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## ***Scientists warn of looming catastrophe as Omicron spreads globally***

The immense global threat of the Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2 is becoming clearer each day, as cases and hospitalizations surge internationally. Worldwide, average official daily new cases now stand at 620,106, a more than 50 percent increase in just the past month. The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation estimates that in reality, nearly 3.3 million people are likely infected each day, with most not detected due to inadequate testing globally. The vast majority of these cases are from the Delta variant, but Omicron is threatening to become dominant globally or surge in tandem in the coming weeks.



Dr. Rafik Abdou and respiratory therapist Babu Paramban check on a COVID-19 patient at Providence Holy Cross Medical Center, LA, Nov. 19, 2020 [Credit: AP Photo/Jae C. Hong, File]

Across Europe, which has been the global epicenter of the pandemic since October, there were a combined 430,968 official new COVID-19 cases on Wednesday. The United Kingdom (a record 78,339 new cases), France (65,713), Germany (55,650), Russia (28,363), Spain (27,140) and Italy (23,190) accounted for a combined roughly 250,000 new cases. Hospitals across Europe, and indeed globally, are strained to the breaking point after nearly two years of continuous mass infections and deaths.

The direst situation is now in the UK, where Omicron cases are doubling every two days and forecasts predict that potentially one million people could become infected each day by Christmas. The fall semester has decimated schools throughout the country, as the total absence of mitigation measures has allowed COVID-19 to run rampant and infect masses of students and educators. In response, the Johnson administration is actively recruiting elderly, retired educators as substitutes in under-staffed schools, setting the stage for a spike in breakthrough infections and deaths in this section of retirees.

In Denmark, which has one of the strongest variant surveillance programs, Omicron has caused a major spike in reinfections among previously infected individuals. Overall, the number of reinfections has increased more than ten-fold in just the past month. In neighboring Norway, forecasts project that more than 100,000 people will be infected with Omicron each day within weeks if there are no changes in behavior.

In the United States, the surge of the Delta variant is deepening throughout much of the country, with the Northeast and Midwest regions hit particularly hard. An average of 121,585 people are officially infected each day, and an average of 1,170 people are dying daily across the country.

In New York and New Jersey, the Omicron variant now accounts for at least 13 percent of all new COVID-19 cases, which are surging dramatically overall. The state of New York reported 18,276 official new cases on Wednesday, a more than 40 percent increase in one day and the highest daily total since January 14. In New York City, the test positivity rate doubled in just three days recently, rising from 3.9 percent to 7.8 percent between December 9-12.

Florida, among the hardest hit states in the US, with three major surges since the start of the pandemic, is beginning its fourth surge amid the rapid spread of the Omicron variant.

A study on wastewater in Orange County, Florida, home to Walt Disney World, found that Omicron accounts for nearly 100 percent of all COVID-19 strains found in the samples.

The most serious and principled scientists are issuing increasingly stark warnings of the looming tidal wave of infections, hospitalizations and deaths as winter approaches in the Northern Hemisphere.

In his weekly podcast update on the pandemic, Director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota Dr. Michael Osterholm warned, “I think we are going to see a viral blizzard literally descend upon the world with Omicron.” He noted that Omicron threatens to combine with the ongoing surge of the Delta variant to wreak havoc, particularly among the unvaccinated.

On Thursday, T-cell immunologist Dr. Anthony Leonardi tweeted about the potential long-term damage that the Omicron surge could cause, writing, “This coming wave with Omicron will probably infect at least half the world’s population. If 10 percent get Long Covid, we are looking at a #MassDisablingEvent.” Dr. Leonardi had repeatedly sounded the alarm about the impact of Long COVID, which can result in neurodegeneration, autoimmune disorders and damage to other organ systems.

In a recent interview with the *World Socialist Web Site*, Dr. Leonardi stressed the immense dangers of the Omicron variant, particularly to unvaccinated children under five years old who have experienced among the highest rates of hospitalization of any age group with Omicron. He also warned that the extraordinary transmissibility of Omicron creates the conditions whereby a new and potentially more dangerous variant could evolve more rapidly than previous variants.

On Wednesday, physician Denise Dewald, who has been an outspoken critic of the pandemic policies implemented by the Trump and Biden administrations, tweeted, “I expect our hospitals will look like Wuhan 2020 in 1-3 weeks,” adding, “But our healthcare workers won’t be wearing good PPE.”

Dr. Malgorzata Gasperowicz, who has continuously advocated for the elimination of SARS-CoV-2 since the start of the pandemic, retweeted a post noting that South Korea has ended its policy of “living with COVID-19.” She added the sharp comment that they

did so “[B]ecause ‘living with COVID-19’ doesn’t work. The only policy that worked and keeps working is elimination strategy. High time that every region on the planet starts aiming to stop the spread. #EndThePandemic.”

The World Health Organization (WHO) echoed these warnings. In an interview with Sky News, Special Envoy on COVID-19 for the WHO Dr. David Nabarro declared, “I’ve been watching and working on this pandemic since January 2020, and I’ve never been more concerned than I am tonight, not just about the UK but about the world.”

When asked whether social gatherings should be limited, he replied bluntly, “It’s doubling every two days. Do you know what that means? It means it will be eight times more serious in one week, 40 times more serious in two weeks, 300-400 times in three weeks. Over 1,000 times more serious in four weeks.”

In response to this impending catastrophe, capitalist governments throughout the world adamantly refuse to implement the necessary public health measures to stop the spread of COVID-19. Above all, they reject the use of emergency lockdowns involving the switch to remote learning at all schools and the closure of nonessential workplaces with income protection for affected workers and small business people.

At a press briefing Wednesday, a reporter asked Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky and White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator Jeffrey Zients, “Do you think, overall, that we need to be, in essence, locking down a little bit again? Should employers, should schools be taking the precautions that we’re seeing, or are they overreacting?”

Dr. Walensky sidestepped the question by promoting vaccines and limited mitigation measures while not commenting on lockdowns. Zients, a multi-millionaire with no experience in public health, emphatically opposed lockdowns and advanced the vaccine-only approach, saying, “We’re in a very different and stronger place than we were a year ago. And there’s no need to lock down.” He added, “We know how to keep our kids in school and our businesses open, and we’re not going to shut down our economy in any way. We’re going to keep our schools and our businesses open. Next question.”

Similarly, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) Dr. Anthony Fauci acknowledged Thursday that Omicron will likely be dominant in “a few weeks” and that it would soon overwhelm hospitals. Like Walensky, he advanced the vaccine-only approach and paid lip service to mitigation measures, saying, “If we do that, I don't believe we'll have to be doing any kind of shutdown with regard to businesses in your community.” Dr. Fauci also endorsed family gatherings over the holidays as long as people are vaccinated, despite the immense dangers of air travel and the well-known risks of breakthrough infections that can lead to Long COVID, hospitalization and even death.

The corporate media has dutifully played its part in chloroforming the public and stunting awareness of the dangers confronting society. On ABC News Thursday night, following a segment which detailed the rapid spread of Omicron and the increasingly dire conditions in hospitals, Dr. Ashish Jha, Dean of the Brown University School of Public Health, gave his stamp of approval to holiday travel plans.

Jha stated, “I think Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, it's possible to gather with family safely. The key in my mind is making sure everybody who can be vaccinated is vaccinated, people are boosted. And if they're high-risk people, elderly, others, getting everybody a rapid test can make it that much safer.”

Jha is a close associate of Brown University economist Emily Oster, who has been one of the foremost advocates of unsafe school reopenings since fall 2020, before the vaccines were even approved. On Thursday, Oster tweeted cynically, “Most people are going to get Omicron regardless of vax status. Contagion is just that high.”

The stark contrast between the warnings of principled scientists like Drs. Leonardi, Dewald, Gasperowicz and others, and the pronouncements of scientists and public health officials connected to the Biden administration and the corporate media, is sharpening each day.

The principles of science and public health are incompatible with the interests of the financial oligarchy, which refuses to implement the basic measures necessary to eliminate COVID-19 and stop the needless infections, suffering and deaths of millions worldwide. The only social force capable of enacting these scientific measures and ending the pandemic is the international working class.

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