

# Over 10,500 Florida children test positive for COVID-19 after schools reopen

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According to a report published in the *Washington Post* earlier this week, cases of COVID-19 among school-aged children in Florida have increased by 34 percent since schools started to reopen in early August. More than 10,500 children under the age of 18 have tested positive since August 10, when about half of the state's 4,500 public schools began ushering students back into their buildings.

On Wednesday, the *Orlando Sentinel* reported that more than 800 students and staff in Central Florida schools were now under quarantine orders after potentially being exposed to COVID-19. On Tuesday, a separate report emerged that 500 students and staff in Pinellas County schools also faced a possible quarantine after similar exposures.

Olympia High School in Orange County, Golfview Elementary School in Brevard County, and Harmony Middle School in Osceola County have all recently been closed after reports surfaced that teachers tested positive for COVID-19. At least nine Manatee County schools reported positive cases between Friday and Tuesday.

Republican Governor Ron DeSantis, meanwhile, has not held an in-person Cabinet meeting since February. The Capitol in Tallahassee has remained shut to the public, despite DeSantis' rabid efforts to reopen schools and loosen restrictions on businesses throughout Florida in the middle of a raging pandemic.

A spokesperson for DeSantis recently stated that "the state's economic engine needs to start running again. While the symbolism of the Capitol opening will be welcome, the fact is, essential work is getting done with essential personnel. In the meantime, we are starting our economic engines."

On Thursday morning, Florida reported 2,583 new cases of COVID-19 and 211 new deaths from the virus. This brings the state's official totals to more than 654,000 confirmed cases and over 12,300 deaths. The new deaths reported Thursday include 49 in Miami-Dade County, 14 in Broward County, and 9 in Palm Beach County—all southern counties hardest hit by COVID-19.

The declining number of positive cases over the past two

months is entirely the result of a similar decline in testing statewide. In July, the daily average of tests given was 54,400; in August it was 32,000; and so far in September it is 23,000. This is about half of the number of daily tests given two months ago, when the daily number of new cases was also more than twice as high. About 4.8 million people have been tested in Florida—not even a quarter of the recorded 2019 population of 21.48 million.

When it comes to schools, the Florida Department of Health (FDOH) has been directing some districts to shut down their individual COVID-19 dashboards, effectively leaving entire communities in the dark about new cases and deaths in their region. This includes Duval County, where a group of courageous educators and parents have launched a rank-and-file safety committee to demand that schools be closed immediately.

The Duval committee invited two local doctors to speak at a virtual meeting this past Tuesday: Dr. Mohammed B. Reza, an infectious disease specialist in Atlantic Beach who is affiliated with the Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville, and Dr. Nancy Staats, a retired anesthesiologist who has been active in pressuring local politicians and administrators to enforce CDC policies. The meeting was attended by teachers, parents, school counselors, and other workers from Duval and surrounding counties.

Dr. Reza began by exposing the official positivity rate currently being reported by the State of Florida—between four and six percent depending on the day—as a sham. He pointed to a resource independent of the influence of the state that shows the real positive test rate is 13.5 percent, a number which indicates insufficient testing.

"Hiding information like the rate of infection and the positive test rate is just mind-blowing to me," Reza stated. "Not only this, but the governor has cut down the number of tests being given since the recent hurricane by half. We all know it's going to get worse. It's like watching a train crash."

When asked to discuss some of the science behind how the virus infects people, Dr. Reza explained that there is no

defined data on how much of a “viral load” is necessary to cause infection. “In other viruses, there is a certain ‘load’ that you need to be exposed to that can cause you to become infected. With HIV, for instance, you need a viral load of about 200 copies to be able to transmit it to another person. Since COVID-19 is aerosolized, the viral load is likely thousands of copies in just a single cough or sneeze from one infected person to another.”

Dr. Reza also explained that excessive cleaning means very little when students, teachers, and staff are being forced into shared spaces. “Cleaning is of course a good idea, but when you have 500 people coming together, that cleaning goes out the door. We’re not even sure if it’s really surfaces that are the main transmitter of the virus. It’s more likely that most infections come from face-to-face interactions. On top of this, children are known to be petri dishes of infections. They touch their faces; they sneeze and cough. Trying to keep a mask on is just not possible in these school settings.”

Dr. Staats reported to those present at the Duval committee meeting that one county inadvertently released data showing that the rate of staff-to-student cases is in the range of 60 to 80 percent. “What this means is that most of the positive cases are among staff and faculty, which tells us that students are not being tested. This could be due to the children being asymptomatic or parents not wanting their kids to be tested.”

“Sadly, children are the Trojan horse in this situation,” Dr. Reza added.

Parents and educators in Osceola County, like their compatriots in Duval, have also been making efforts to fight their school reopenings. Several community members, including Christina Stewart, who sent a statement to the *World Socialist Web Site* last week, attended their school board meeting on Tuesday to denounce the reopening policies and relate how frightened educators are to speak out on conditions for fear of losing their jobs.

Megan Carter, a daycare worker, chastised the school board: “I think it’s very disingenuous to pretend that opening schools was going to be less disruptive than going into schools knowing that there were going to be cases and knowing that there were going to be people who would get infected and have to quarantine. With a little creativity, we could’ve gone back to school 100 percent virtually. We could’ve planned for this. It’s a shame that we haven’t.”

Carter demanded that the school board explain why Poinciana High School had its entire cafeteria staff absent from school that day without any explanation or notice that they were being quarantined. She was never answered except with a boiler-plate response later in the meeting from the board and Superintendent Debra Pace that “we are

putting all the information that we legally can put on [our] web site.”

The FDOH, which has suppressed public knowledge of COVID-19 infections in schools, has told news outlets that it is working to release data about schools and daycare centers, but has not given a timetable on when this vital information will be made public, saying vaguely that it could take days or weeks. The state’s existing COVID-19 dashboard has been mired in controversy throughout the year. In May, Rebekah Jones, the state’s top COVID-19 researcher who developed the dashboard, was fired after she refused to manipulate data.

Despite having the highest numbers of cases and deaths in the state, Broward and Miami-Dade counties, which remain in “Phase 1” of reopening, are also discussing a deadly return to in-person learning. Broward County School Superintendent Robert Runcie held a news conference Tuesday saying that schools in his county will be reopening in October “if the current trends continue,” a reference to the incomplete data being issued by the state.

“We need to be prepared for a challenging school year which could be a roller coaster when it comes to the virus,” Runcie stated. His comparison of this deadly situation to an amusement park ride sums up the disdain of the ruling class and its lackeys for the lives of students, teachers, staff, and their loved ones.

*The Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee* has been formed to coordinate and facilitate the building of a network of rank-and-file safety committees in every school and neighborhood, to organize the immense opposition to the murderous plan to reopen schools. All those who agree with this perspective should contact us today, join our Facebook group and make plans to attend our next online call-in meeting Saturday, September 12. Register today and share the event widely with your coworkers and friends!



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