

Students speak on mass spread of COVID on college campuses as semester begins

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The fall semester on college campuses across the United States begins amid a massive surge of COVID-19. Just days into the new school year, and with some campuses yet to open, reports of mass infections have already begun to circulate on social media. Despite the surge on campuses, there has been no mention of it anywhere in the mainstream media.

A post to Reddit on the r/ZeroCovidCommunity subreddit described the current spread of COVID-19 on college campuses. The post's author wrote, "[W]ithin less than two weeks of people being back, covid is spreading like wildfire." Noticing the increase of cases, the student described concerning symptoms among classmates: "I struggle to even describe the type of coughing I'm hearing—it's this deep hacking that sounds like it should be in a period drama tuberculosis ward instead of a lecture hall."

In an interview with the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS), the Reddit poster, who asked to remain anonymous, explained that they are a second year wildlife science major at a large college in the southeast U.S. with a student body of approximately 40,000. They noted that their college does not protect students nor do they offer any guidance to students who get sick. "There are no institutional protections for students who test positive, and they instead have to work out missing classes with their professors," said the student. On a popular social media app called Yik Yak, many students have posted that they have tested positive for COVID-19 since returning to classes from summer break.

Students also reported that some of their lectures were canceled after the professors called out sick due to "colds" or "allergies," when, in reality, it was in all likelihood a result of undiagnosed COVID-19, with the culprit probably being the K.P.3.1.1 (FLIRT) variant.

The latest mass infection among college students refutes, yet again, the lie of the Biden administration that

the "pandemic is over." The student, whose father died from COVID-19 in 2021, told the WSWS,

It's definitely frustrating to me, especially when that proclamation has been alongside President Biden alone having COVID, if I remember correctly, three times in the past two years. Ending the COVID national emergency didn't change the fact that COVID is still surging horrendously and causing a lot of harm. I feel like it's also allowed this erosion of public health that's happening because this ensuing "COVID is over" rhetoric means that it's become normalized to not quarantine or to go about life while potentially being actively sick. I feel like it's opened a lot of doors to what feels like a complete regression in public health programs, societal perception and expectations. Being sick or going around sick has become more accepted since the pandemic "ended."

Another student, a linguistics major studying in the University of California system, also voiced concerns over hearing students with "horrible wet coughs everywhere," along with the lack of any protocols to stop transmission. In an interview with the WSWS, the student described the lack of protections, estimating that in a lecture hall of more than 100 people, only one or two people would be masking.

In this context, the University of California's recent directive to ban face masks on campus under certain conditions is a dangerous precedent. While the ban was issued as part of an attack on democratic rights in response to protests by students against the genocide in Gaza, it is a step toward banning masks under all

circumstances and constitutes a significant assault on the right to public health. In instituting these measures, the university administration worked closely together with the Democratic Party and the Biden administration.

Recalling the violent crackdown on student protesters, the UC student said, “On my campus, we had only a small, extremely peaceful, protest encampment for Gaza.” In response to this encampment, the university called out “police in riot gear as a response to clear it out. There were snipers and students were arrested.”

The WWSWS also spoke with a recently graduated Fine Arts student from Canada who reported that after their university’s mask mandate ended in 2022, “there was rarely anyone masking after that. Maybe 1 out of 70. I don’t think I ever saw a professor mask.”

The student explained that in Canada, the dismantling of COVID-19 protocols has been undertaken very quietly. Institutions simply discontinued mask mandates. This also included hospitals, which directly affected this student who had to go to a hospital to receive immunosuppressive therapy. They commented, “Since we don’t talk about COVID at all anymore, the general public does not have any information on vaccine boosters, high quality masks, proper ventilation and air quality, or even how or when to test for COVID. My government just went silent on the issue.”

In the United States, as of August 26, wastewater modeling from Dr. Mike Hoerger shows that 1.2 million Americans are being infected with COVID-19 each day, with 1 in 41 people, 2.5 percent of the population, actively infected. This is the highest back-to-school surge in the US to date. In Canada, the government’s wastewater monitoring dashboard shows that COVID-19 activity is “high,” while RSV and flu activity are low.

Under these conditions, the mass spread of the disease on college campuses was entirely predictable. Even before universities reopened, several K-12 schools throughout the US, including Jefferson Abernathy Graetz (JAG) High School in Montgomery, Alabama and Stigall Primary in Humboldt, Tennessee, canceled in-person classes due to outbreaks at the start of the school year.

The Biden administration bears direct responsibility for this renewed wave of mass infection, which will kill thousands and impact the long-term health of many more. Since Biden took office, he has followed in the steps of his predecessor Trump in dismantling all public health measures and forcing workers and youth to return to classrooms and workplaces without any mitigation measures. Testing for COVID-19 has been drastically

reduced, vaccinations are no longer free and often difficult to obtain, and masking has been completely dismantled in every state, with some local jurisdictions even banning the use of masks.

Under Biden’s administration, the CDC repeatedly reduced quarantine and isolation guidelines until fully scrapping them altogether this year, encouraging infectious people to continue to go to work and school. All these measures have been implemented under the murderous policy of herd immunity and “forever COVID .”

Despite the lies of the media and government, COVID-19 remains an active threat around the world. Millions of people, including children and young adults, have developed Long COVID, in which symptoms persist for months or years. The effects of Long COVID can be devastating and impact virtually every organ in the body, while also causing significant declines in cognitive capabilities.

The ongoing impact of the pandemic on the youth exposes one of the central lies of the pandemic, that COVID-19 is “mild” for children and young people. In fact, a 2023 study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association found that between August 2021 and July 2022, COVID-19 was the 8th leading cause of death among youth ages 0-19, and 1st in deaths caused by infectious or respiratory diseases. Multiple studies have linked COVID-19 to rising rates of Type 1 diabetes in children.

Describing the risk of COVID-19 infections among youth, including college students, leading Long COVID researcher Amy Proal told the WWSWS, “We’re seeing children, from a young age, with viral RNA in their tissues, with a virus that people are getting multiple times a year as it continues to mutate, and we ... see that reinfection seems to up the chances of developing chronic symptoms. It’s absolutely unsustainable and a complete crisis.”



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