

Are Schools **Really** Safe to Open?

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Science serving politics!

- One week into Biden’s presidency there has been a massive coordinated effort by the CDC, the Democratic Party and the mainstream press to **promote claims that schools are safe havens** for students during a raging pandemic.
- On January 26, three CDC researchers published a statement in JAMA – a thoroughly political hack job – that attempted to borrow selective “evidence” that supposedly proves schools were not vectors for the transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

Their claims and their evidence

- As many schools have reopened for in-person instruction in some parts of **the US as well as internationally**, school-related cases of COVID-19 have been reported, but **there has been little evidence that schools have contributed meaningfully to increased community transmission.**
- They also refer to a recent CDC study that found that in 17 **K-12 schools in rural Wisconsin with high mask adherence**, COVID-19 incidence was lower in schools than in the community. During 13 weeks of the study in the fall of 2020, there were 191 COVID-19 cases in staff and students. They found that only 7 of these cases determined to result from in-school transmission.
- Not one news outlet has sought to offer any substantial critique of the study, quoting verbatim their conclusions as a done deal. **Even Biden's press secretary had to clarify that because the study was done in a rural setting, and was not applicable to more populated centers, the case presented by the media is made all the more egregious.**

The Wisconsin Study – Context

- The study period was from **August 31 to November 29, 2020**.
- Seventeen K-12 schools in **rural Wisconsin** participated, involving 4,876 students and 654 staff. **Surveillance in schools was initiated by a small group of physicians and medical student researchers.**
- The districts received **funding from the Legacy Foundation of Central Wisconsin** to purchase **three-layer cloth face masks for all students.**
- **Classes ranged from 11 to 20 students.** (In Wisconsin, average class sizes are approximately 20.) Students were asked to always wear their masks indoors and stay six feet apart.

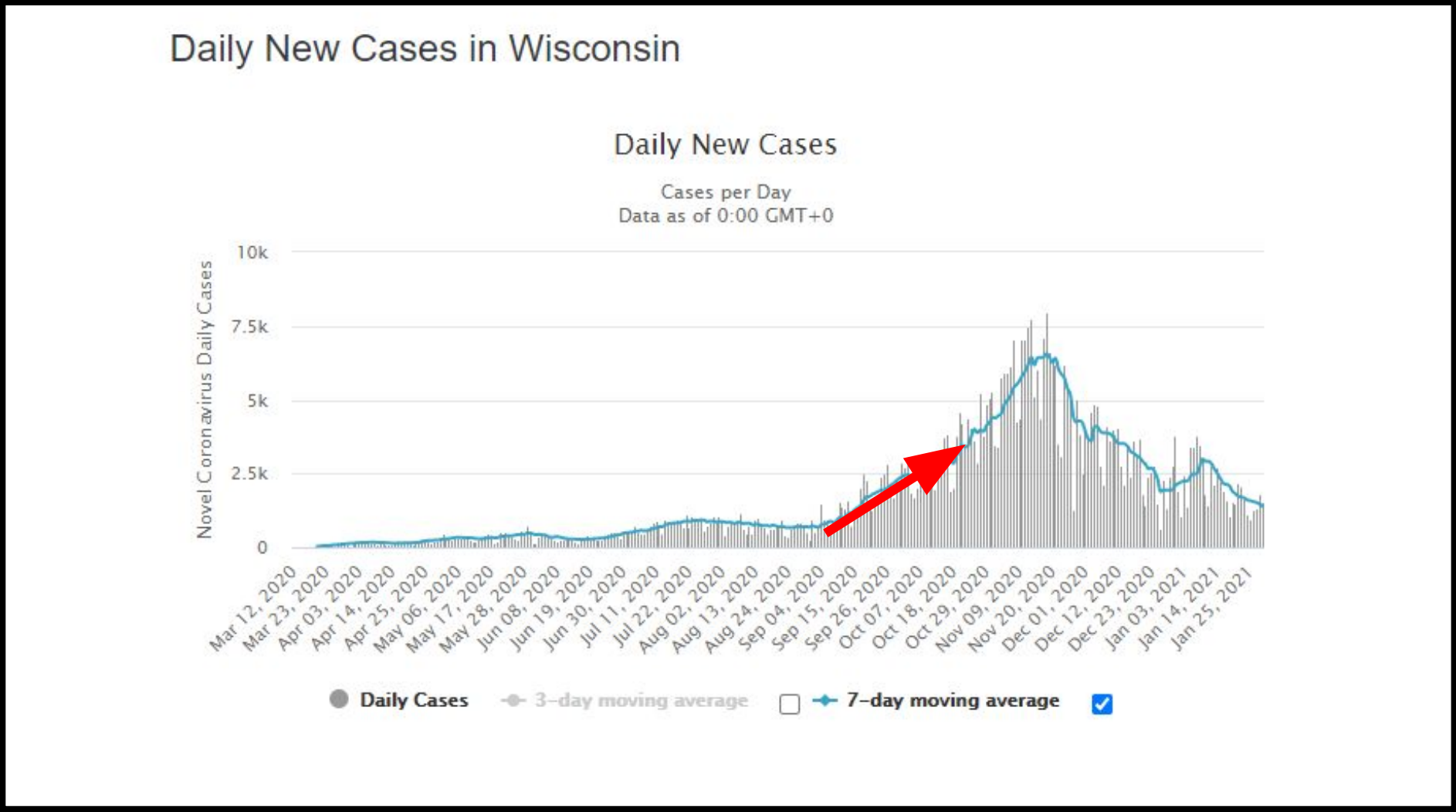
The Wisconsin Study – Results

- COVID-19 incidence among students and staff, compared to the county overall, was 3,453 versus 5,466 per 100,000. Among the 191 cases identified among students and teachers, **only seven cases (3.7 percent) were linked to in-school spread.**

The Wisconsin Study – Critique

- Schools **did not conduct infection screening** of staff members and students, negating the ability to estimate the prevalence of asymptomatic spread.
- **No serological studies** were conducted to assess any linkage between schools and the rising community transmission being experienced in the state.
- The **biases embedded and overlooked** in this study where **school surveillance is being conducted by researchers, political scrutiny on the educational district** is considerable, and the **rural setting** makes generalizing from their recommendations to real-life situations difficult.

The Pandemic in Wisconsin



International development

Prime Minister of the UK Boris Johnson – “The problem is schools may nonetheless act as vectors for transmission, causing the virus to spread between households.”

- More recent data from Europe has demonstrated otherwise:
 - Antoine Flahault, director of the University of Geneva’s Institute of Global Health: “In the second wave, we acquired much more evidence that school children are almost equally, if not more infected by SARS-CoV-2 than others.”
 - Swiss schools have been open since summer. Using antibody tests, they found that children ages 6 to 18 were becoming infected just as much as young adults.
 - An Austrian nationwide survey found that children under 10 have similar infection rates as older children. These children were becoming infected as often as their teachers.
 - In December in the UK, positivity rates were higher among children than adults.

Epidemiology and transmission dynamics of COVID-19 in two Indian states – November 6

- Indian states of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh had developed a **rigorous contact tracing and testing system**. The study indicated that **super spreading events dominated**, with approximately 5 percent of infected individuals accounting for 80 percent of secondary cases.
- “What we found in our study is that children were actually quite important. They were likely to get infected, particularly by young adults of the ages 20 to 40. **They were likely to transmit the disease amongst themselves ... and they also go out and infect people of all age groups, including the elderly**. Many kids are **silent spreaders** in the sense that they don’t manifest the disease with symptoms. They happen to get infected as much as anyone else, and then they happen to spread it to other people.”

Montreal Study from January 2021

- “As the start of the fall 2020 school year coincided with the start of the second wave in many European countries and Canada, the debate became particularly heated. What has been the role of transmission of COVID-19 in school-aged children for the overall incidence of infection in fall 2020? The answer to this question has immediate political relevance in deciding if, when, and how to reopen schools as the pandemic unfolds and immunization coverage remains low.”
– Dr. Simona Bignami

Montreal Study – Background

- Montreal's public health department had documented 7.5 cases per 100,000 inhabitants around mid-August. By January 5, 2021, the incidence of infections had climbed to 282.7 cases per 100,000, with its concomitant rise in hospitalizations and deaths.
- However, Quebec's government decided to reopen schools on January 11, stating, as have their American counterparts, that adults are conveying the circulation of the virus in the community because COVID-19 cases were higher among them than children. They, too, adamantly stated that affected schools had only reported some isolated cases.

Montreal Study – COVID Écoles Quebec

- The authors turned to a remarkable database compiled and published by the Regional Health Directorate of Montreal, which tracks weekly cases across 26 boroughs at 339 Montreal schools.
- They found that **infections in children** aged 10 to 19 **preceded** those among **adults** aged 30 to 49.
- By November, they saw an acceleration in new cases in children aged 0 to 9 at the same rate as in other age groups, implying that once community spread becomes high, not even young children are spared.
- They concluded that “the transmission of COVID among children of school age does not appear to be the consequence, but rather an important determinant of the general level of infection in surrounding communities.”
- In an interview with Global News Canada, Oliver Drouin, one of the co-authors of the study, and who runs COVID Écoles Quebec, made a revealingly cogent observation, “When you have a case in school, you may have one, two, three other cases at home that are not counted as school cases but of course they are counted as home cases.”

Marine Recruits during Quarantine – NEJM

Asymptomatic transmission

- 1,848 Marine recruits volunteered to participate
- They were asked to quarantine at home two weeks before arriving
- They were quarantined for two additional weeks on an isolated college campus
- Within two days of arriving, they had a PCR test conducted
- They were required to socially distance, wear masks, and had daily temperatures and symptom monitoring
- On day 7 and 14 of their stay, they had repeated PCR testing

Marine Recruits during Quarantine – NEJM

Asymptomatic transmission

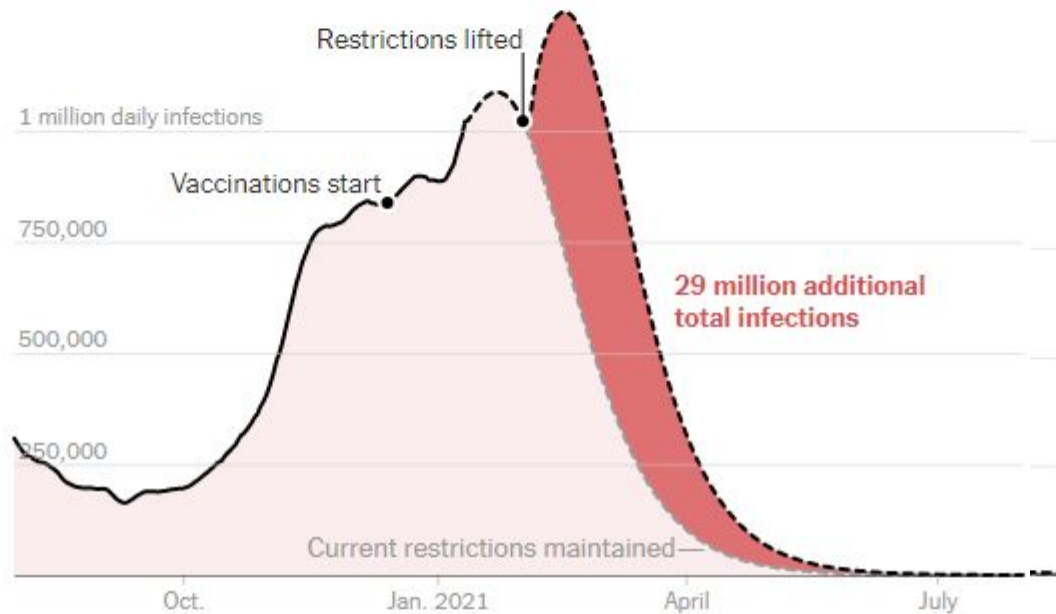
- The average age of recruits is between 18 and 21, just over high school students' ages, and therefore applicable to the issue we are discussing.
- On arrival there were 16 recruits (about 1 percent) that tested positive. **Fifteen were asymptomatic.**
- By the end of the study period, an additional 35 recruits tested positive, bringing the total to 51. **Five recruits, or only 9.8 percent, were symptomatic.**
- **No SARS-CoV-2 infections were identified through “clinical” PCR as a result of daily symptom monitoring.**
- Genomic analysis revealed six transmission clusters among 18 participants.

School closures are **essential** to controlling the pandemic!

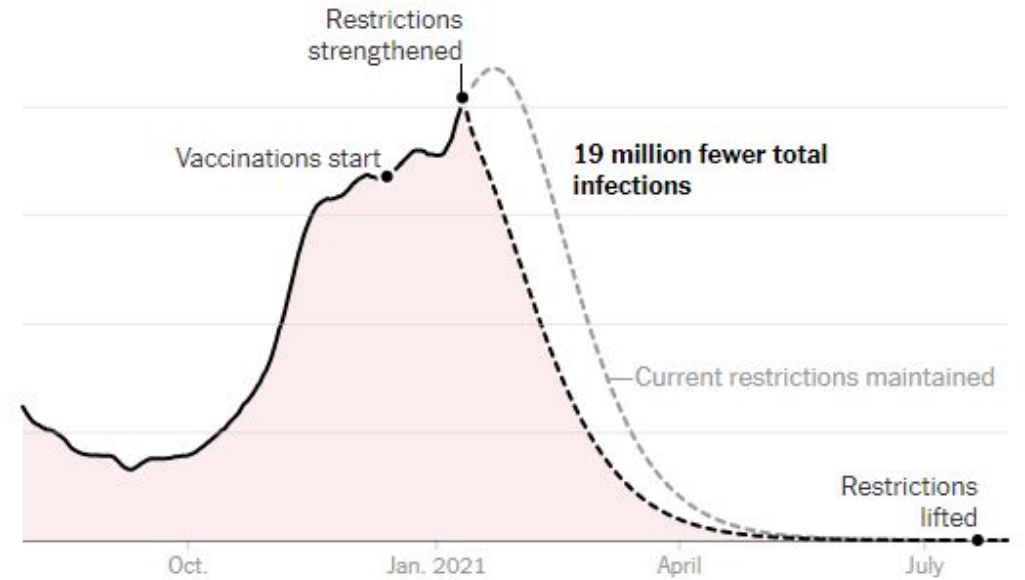
- One essential factor that the Democrats, the CDC, and the bourgeois press keep silent on is that school closures are a crucial mitigating measure to aid in curtailing community transmission.
- Teachers and students must have safe environments to conduct a class without fear of becoming infected.
- But the principal reason for school closures is to **suppress the transmission of the virus, to protect health systems, and avoid further loss of life and spread of disease among the population.**

A difference of 48 million infections translates to 250,000 deaths that could be averted

If restrictions are lifted in February



If restrictions are strengthened until late July



<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2021/01/25/herd-j25.html>

Mitigation studies and schools

- In a JAMA study published on July 29, the authors had found that **statewide school closures in the first wave of the pandemic led to a decline in the incidence of COVID-19 of 62 percent per week.** Similarly, mortality saw a 58 percent decrease per week. States that closed earlier saw the most significant relative change per week.
- In a study published in Science, looking at various government interventions used against COVID-19, the **combination of the closure of schools and universities, limiting gatherings to 10 people or less, and closing most nonessential businesses** were most important.

Mitigation studies and schools

- In a *Nature* study published in November that ranked the effectiveness of worldwide COVID-19 interventions, the **cancellation of small gatherings, closure of educational institutions, border restrictions, increased availability of PPE, and individual restrictions** were statistically significant in reducing the reproductive number, R_0 .
- A German discussion paper published in July evaluated the effectiveness of school closures and other pre-lockdown COVID-19 mitigations across three countries – **Argentina, Italy and South Korea**: **“Our estimates indicate that the interventions prevented 84%, 29%, and 91% COVID-19 deaths ... The later schools were closed nationwide during the course of the pandemic, the lower the effectiveness of this measure. Indeed, in Brazil, France, the UK, and Spain, we do not detect any reducing effect of the early interventions on the number of deaths.”**

Variants of the SARS-CoV-2

- B.1.1.7 or the UK Variant
- B.1.351 or South African variant
- P.1 or Brazilian variant
- All share the N501Y mutation of the Receptor Binding Domain of the virus plus additional mutations that are unique to them
- The Spike protein's RBD is the exposed tip that binds to human ACE2 receptors on our cells, and this is the site where our antibodies attack the virus.

All present in the US



Variants of the SARS-CoV-2

- Increase the contagiousness
- The UK variant has been demonstrated to be more lethal and possibly impact women and younger people more than the wild type
- The South African variant has been shown to reduce vaccine efficacy

Variants of the SARS-CoV-2

- According to Dr. Stephen Goldstein, an evolutionary virologist from the University of Utah, “The **convergent evolution of wilder versions** of the virus might just be a consequence of so many poorly managed government pandemic responses, which didn’t marshal sufficient resources or inspire the kind of collective action required to not just crush the initial curve, but keep it crushed.”

Variants of the SARS-CoV-2

“Risk of variants relative to the vaccines is ever greater when the transmission is very high in the communities. Not only because of variants that have occurred, but because of the possibility of additional variants emerging under the pressure of vaccines. We risk something about those tools [vaccines] if we are also not suppressing transmission to the maximum degree possible where those tools can be effective in a setting when there is limited transmission...We have to emphasize about the importance of really crushing transmission now while we are rolling out these new vaccines.”

The World Health Organization

- Schools must close as part of a larger containment strategy
- The Biden Administration and the Democrats are playing with fire in every sense of the word. The well-being of the community cannot be left in the hands of any government that places the enrichment of the financial oligarchs over its population's well-being.