

# Trump administration refuses to vaccinate migrants in detention centers

By Alex González  
21 August 2019

The US federal government will not be vaccinating migrants ahead of this year's flu season, according to a Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) statement. Of the six children that have died while in the custody of the American Gestapo since September 2018, three have died due to flu-related illnesses.

"In general, due to the short-term nature of CBP holding and the complexities of operating vaccination programs, neither CBP nor its medical contractors administer vaccinations to those in our custody," stated a CBP spokesperson. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that all children older than six months old receive an annual flu vaccination.

The announcement came after a group of doctors affiliated with Harvard and Johns Hopkins wrote a letter to Congress in early August demanding an investigation of health conditions at border facilities. Influenza deaths among US children is "extremely rare," according to the US doctors. This past flu season, the CDC reported 124 influenza child fatalities. This represents a rate of about one reported death per 600,000 children. Yet at migrant detention centers, three children out of 200,000 detained have died of influenza—a rate that is nearly 10 times higher.

The letter to Congress states that migrant children in detention centers are already at a higher risk of contracting influenza than individuals born in the United States. With lower rates of immunization, higher rates of other infectious diseases, and inadequate pediatric care early in life, the immune-compromised migrants would be granted the highest level of medical care under a scientific and rational society.

The refusal to provide vaccinations cannot be explained by the "complexity" of organizing an immunization campaign in migrant camps. Nor can it

be explained by the "short-term" nature of a child's detention, which, in reality, often drags into the weeks or months. Rather, the decision to run filthy and disease-ridden detention camps is part of a definite strategy by Trump's fascistic advisers.

They calculate that by inflicting both physical and emotional harm on immigrants, the US government will be able to deter the hundreds of thousands of workers, peasants, and youth that want to flee their intolerable conditions of poverty and violence and exercise their international right to asylum. Trump and his advisers do not wish to prevent illness, but to stoke it.

With the support of the Democratic Party, the US has set up concentration camps that are ideal breeding grounds for infectious diseases. "Rapid turnover of detainees increases the spread of influenza by creating an inflow of people in rapidly consecutive cohorts (a 'revolving door' effect)," wrote the doctors.

A rapid turnover of migrants has been combined with a deliberate overcrowding of migrant facilities in which contagious diseases can easily spread. In a particularly outrageous example, a CNN report in late May revealed that 900 immigrants were being held in a facility with the capacity for 125.

In a further attack on their immune systems, migrants are routinely denied access to basic hygienic products such as soap and a toothbrush. "There is no soap for the kids to wash their hands with. We saw many, many sick children," said a group of attorneys that visited two Border Patrol processing centers this summer. "We immediately saw children who were coughing and had runny noses. They had mucus all over their shirts."

Infectious diseases have already broken out in federal facilities this year. A mass quarantine of 8,000 detainees took place at the Texas McAllen Central

Processing Center in late May due to a “large number” of immigrants showing signs of “flu-related” symptoms, according to CBP. In March, an ICE official stated that more than 2,200 immigrants were quarantined across the country.

The influenza-related deaths of the three migrant children stand as a stark warning to the kind of humanitarian crisis that could very well break out among the immigrant population.

Felipe Alonzo-Gómez, aged 8, died as a complication of the flu on December 24, 2018, six days after he and his father crossed into the US. While in CBP custody, he developed a sore throat and nasal congestion. He tested positive for Influenza B in a local hospital and died after he was discharged back into federal custody.

Two-year-old Wilmer Josué Ramírez Vásquez died in May 2019 after being admitted to the emergency room with multiple respiratory and gastrointestinal infections. Wilmer’s mother took him to the US because he was severely sick and the family could not afford medical attention in Guatemala.

Sixteen-year-old Carlos Gregorio Hernández Vásquez was in excellent health when he was taken into custody, according to his family. He died of influenza, complicated by pneumonia and sepsis, after being detained for six days—twice as long as the legally-mandated maximum of 72 hours for unaccompanied migrant children.

Such crimes could not take place without the active political support of the Democratic Party. In late June, the House Democrats voted overwhelmingly to provide detention centers with an additional \$4.6 billion in funding, ensuring a non-stop wave of arrests and detentions for immigrant children.

To prevent future crimes against some of the most vulnerable sections of the working class, the mass support for immigrants that exists among the population must be mobilized as an independent force, in opposition to the Democrats and Republicans, the twin parties of deportation and detention, based on a socialist program of open borders and the immediate liberation of all detained immigrants.

---

To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit: