

Over 300 children catch COVID-19 in Texas daycares

By Nick Barrickman
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Over 900 cases of COVID-19 have been reported at daycare centers in the state of Texas in the last month and a half. At least 307 children and 643 staff members have tested positive for the deadly disease in the state's childcare facilities since their reopening in mid-May.

According to the *Texas Tribune*, as of last Tuesday over 950 cases of the deadly disease were reported at 668 different centers throughout the state. According to Dr. Nicholas Rister, a pediatric infectious diseases expert in Ft. Worth, the cases of COVID-19 confirmed in Texas daycares have skyrocketed in the months since the state has dropped all measures to curb the spread of the virus.

“Based on just the number of children that are testing positive in our area, it has more than doubled in the past couple of weeks,” Rister told the local CBS affiliate in the city last week.

On July 4, the Texas Department of State Health reported 191,790 cases of COVID-19, with an additional 2,608 deaths. Texas currently has the third-highest number of COVID-19 cases, behind New York state and California.

“These numbers are definitely alarming,” states the parenting website Moms.com of the outbreaks in Texas daycares. “We should ask ourselves if these children are recovering as they would from the cold or flu, or if they are gravely suffering,” the website adds, noting, “[b]ased on this happening only in June, it makes parents question what’s to happen with the school year in the fall.”

Last week, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) gave an official recommendation for school systems. “All policy considerations for the coming school year should start with a goal of having students physically present in school,” the AAP insisted. Disregarding the Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention (CDC) recommendations, the AAP told school administrators, “the relative impact of physical distancing among children is likely small based on current evidence and certainly difficult to implement.”

In fact, hundreds of cases of multisystem inflammatory syndrome have been detected across the United States and in Europe, a disease in children linked to exposure to the SARS-COV-2 virus. In addition, the transmission of the virus from children to the rest of the community is far more likely to occur as schools and daycares begin to reopen.

Nor are children immune from the worst effects of the novel coronavirus. An 11-year-old Florida boy with preexisting health conditions died last week after contracting COVID-19, making him the youngest person to die from the disease in the state.

“Schools were designed for efficiency, which means crowded hallways and tight classrooms,” New Jersey educator Mark Weber explained in a comment published in the *Washington Post*. “Schools are expected to foster student and teacher interactions, which means close quarters. Expecting every student and staff member to maintain a three-foot [bubble] around themselves is not realistic given the way most school buildings are laid out,” the teacher writes.

Schools have been under immense pressure to resume activities as states have sought to implement the march back to work. A study conducted in Germany estimates that 8.4 percent of Europe's economic output will evaporate if school and childcare facilities do not open. Studies of the US economy produced similar findings.

“If schools don't open, a lot of people can't go back to work,” JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon wrote in a comment for the *Washington Post*. According to the *Post*, nearly a third of all US workers have children under the age of 18. “Even parents who can work from

home are struggling to produce the same amount of work while balancing child care,” the *Post* notes.

The University of Chicago’s Becker Friedman Institute estimates 17.5 million workers in the United States will not be able to return to full-time jobs without places to watch their children throughout the day.

Childcare has been decimated by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a recent study by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), as many as half of the US’s childcare facilities may be closed permanently before the end of the pandemic. At least 258,000 childcare workers, or 25 percent of the total, have been laid off since March.

This crisis has hit larger corporate chains as well as small independently run facilities. “The child-care industry is going through a gut-wrenching challenge right now,” KinderCare Learning Centers CEO Tom Wyatt told the *Post*. The CEO stated that because of class size restrictions allowing only 10 children per room, the corporation was not earning money. “Obviously, that is not sustainable,” he declared.

Lobbyists for the industry have sought additional funds from the US government to assist them in bearing the cost of the prolonged drop in business. Congress allocated just \$3.5 billion in aid to childcare providers to defray losses prior to the most recent bill through the CARES Act passed in March.

Last week, the Democratic majority House of Representatives passed the Moving Forward Act, an infrastructure bill that would allot \$10 billion to childcare facilities to help them enable good social distancing measures. However, the bill has already been declared “dead on arrival” in the Republican-controlled Senate.

The rush to reopen schools is drawing immense resistance from school workers. According to a joint *USA Today/Ipsos* survey released in May, one in five teachers say they will not go back if ordered into classrooms in the fall. “They don’t supply hand sanitizer. They don’t supply wipes. None of these supplies were ever given to us. You just used what you had or what teachers themselves purchased,” Robin Stauffer, an elementary school teacher in Texas explained to Houston Public Media. Stauffer, who is 66 with diabetes, was speaking about conditions at her job prior to the pandemic.

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