

San Diego County seeks to exclude university outbreaks to undercount coronavirus cases

By Melody Isley
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As California reaches new record levels of infection, officials in San Diego County are attempting to artificially lower the COVID-19 case numbers by demanding the state exclude the recent outbreak at San Diego State University (SDSU) from the county's case count.

There are now over 851 cases reported among SDSU students, growing from 648 just days ago. The reckless reopening of the campus has created a community health disaster that will undoubtedly lead to more hospitalizations and more deaths throughout the region.

While SDSU was recently forced to end on-campus classes in the face of immense public pressure, the residence halls remain open. The majority of students in the residence halls are living with roommates and remain in close contact with other groups of students. Students have reported anxiety about testing positive for the virus, as well as fear over the horrific conditions of the isolation dorms which have been exposed on **Twitter** and other social media platforms.

This week will see the start of the university's ham-fisted "mandatory" testing system for on-campus residents being implemented in an attempt to save face after garnering a mountain of negative attention in national headlines.

In response to the outbreak, SDSU administration has continually blamed students for becoming ill. SDSU President Adela de la Torre recently complained about a "plague of parties" for their record-breaking infection rate, according to the San Diego Tribune.

This past week, SDSU Vice President J. Luke Wood ominously threatened students with suspensions and unstated "consequences" if they refuse to "submit to testing" or are found in violation of campus policies.

San Diego County appears to be following the example of administrations across the country,

including New York's State University (SUNY) system, which also publicly blamed students for the rising case rates.

In reality, the outbreak of cases at SDSU is a direct product of the administration's own reckless policy to reopen for in-person learning. Every bit of credible science that has emerged since the onset of the pandemic indicated that the reopening of schools would act as a dangerous spreader of the virus.

Now, as cases skyrocket, putting the whole region at risk, San Diego County Supervisors is lobbying to artificially lower the COVID-19 case numbers by excluding the recent outbreak at SDSU from the official county case count.

The main motivation for the exemption is to allow the county to remain within a particular range of cases, in line with Governor Gavin Newsom's "tiered" reopening plan, in order to keep the economy from shutting down.

The four color-coded tiers outlined in his plan determine the rules of the lockdowns and reopenings for every county in California. The system is based upon a pattern of case rates and test positivity rates and is regulated upon counties' week-by-week case counts, thus not allowing shutdowns to correspond in real-time to outbreaks.

The tier system calculates county averages in such a way that if the county's case numbers report a large spike near the middle or end of any 21-day period, the average may be unaffected by the outbreak, and the tier would remain unchanged. In fact, in some cases the county would be forced to endure another 21 days of surging cases before being moved into the "less safe" tiers.

This system is a tactical move by the state government to frustrate businesses and residents with

constantly changing guidelines. Currently, 70 percent of the population lives in “purple” counties, where rates are too high to be considered “safe enough” to reopen. “Red” counties, like San Diego, are the second most dangerous tier, but allow for the limited operation of businesses like gyms, salons, and churches, and indoor operation at restaurants. San Diego has been enjoying the privileges of the “red tier” for several weeks now, even as they reach 44,000 cases and 757 deaths as of September 19.

Citing their concern for the economy, the County Board of Supervisors is lobbying Governor Gavin Newsom to ignore the SDSU outbreak, because if the more than 800 infected students were included in the county case count, San Diego would be pushed into the strict “purple” tier of reopening.

One particularly revealing public statement from County Supervisor Kristin Gaspar spoke to the root of their concern: “We have a major problem with the caseload at SDSU—a problem that threatens to shut down our economy completely for a third time.” The problem, in the eyes of the various representatives of the political establishment, is not that there is a health emergency among students, but that damage to the local economy is not palatable for the county politicians.

Another County Supervisor even went as far to argue that since it was the state of California, and not *the county*, that gave universities the “green light” to open their campuses, this should exempt any cases among university students from being counted in the county numbers. This argument is both absurd and politically dangerous as it argues for picking and choosing on what numbers to report.

KPBS reported that “at least four county supervisors have indicated they believe SDSU's cases should not be counted in our totals, and they could decide to take legal action ahead of our descent to the purple tier and its restrictions.” This message is being relayed to small businesses, including struggling restaurant and gym owners who are on the brink of ruin, to stoke up animosity against the students.

No officials in sight have acknowledged their responsibility for the outbreaks.

The actions of the San Diego County Supervisors are in line with similar sentiments given by Donald Trump earlier this week where he stated that if Democrat-run

states were excluded from the national case count, his handling of the pandemic would seem much better. In fact, as the surge became more entrenched throughout the US, the White House issued a directive to bypass the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in collecting the critical data on hospitalizations and report the information to state departments or via a private portal that relays the data directly to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Artificially lowering case numbers, by any means, including “cooking the books,” is being used by the ruling class to justify the unsafe return to work, and signifies an even greater commitment to the dissolution of democratic ideals. It is an assault upon the free and accurate sharing of information. These actions will have deadly consequences.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at SDSU strongly condemns the attempt to alter the case count and to blame students for the outbreaks. The outbreak at SDSU and other university campuses is the product of criminal policies of the university administration up to Democratic Governor Newsom himself.

The deplorable policies of the ruling class are pushed forth as a function of the capitalist system. The IYSSE encourages workers and students who want to fight against these deadly policies to join our movement and take up the fight for socialism.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>