

Covid-19: Death Toll Worse Than Reported in the U.S.

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One week ago, the official death toll from COVID-19 in the United States was 3,700. Today, April 7, the number has risen to well over 12,000. But this underestimates the real figure.

An article in yesterday's New York Times reports "... hospital officials, doctors, public health experts and medical examiners say that official counts have failed to capture the true number of Americans dying in this pandemic. The undercount is a result of inconsistent protocols, limited resources and a patchwork of decision-making from one state to the next" and limited availability of tests.

In short, there is no national overall plan to confront the pandemic, or even to collect true information. Another indication of the abject failure of the Trump administration, which literally has blood on its hands.

The article gives some examples. "A coroner in Indiana wanted to know if the corona virus had killed a man in early March, but said her health department denied a test. Paramedics in New York City say that many patients who died at home were never tested for the corona virus, even if they showed telltale signs of infection.

"In Virginia, a funeral director prepared the remains of three people after health workers cautioned her that they each had tested positive for the coronavirus. But only one of the three had the virus noted on the death certificate."

In addition, prison authorities, including those in for-profit private institutions, have an interest in underreporting cases and deaths among the huge prison population where there is no possibility of "safe separation."

The same is true for the immigrants being held in crowded facilities, most private for-profit, under the control of Immigration and Customs enforcement (ICE). They especially want to cover up sickness and death of the children being held in crowded cages.

The undocumented, homeless and uninsured also are susceptible to dying from the virus, without ever having been tested and counted.

Dozens of immigrants at the Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma, Washington, have been on hunger strike since April 3 to protest their continued imprisonment at the for-profit facility. This is a striking immigrant prisoner: "We're just asking for deportations to be postponed while the pandemic passes. We are not asking for anything more. I think we are human. We are not animals to be treated as the worst thing in this country. We are asking for a humanitarian visa."

It is just now being reported that among the hardest hit are African Americans. Today I saw on CNN three reports. In Louisiana, Blacks make up one-third of the population, but 70 percent of the deaths. In Illinois, 15 percent of the population and 42 percent of the deaths. In the city of

Milwaukee, 26 percent of the population and 71 percent of the deaths.

Those are only the reported deaths. Blacks are disproportionately represented among the above categories of the under reported.

African Americans have significantly worse indicators of general health, including for conditions that make the sickness more dangerous, including high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, asthma, and more.

Latinos are also being hard hit. One district in New York City is in the borough of Queens, and has become an epicenter within the larger epicenter of the city. This is one area in the district represented by Congresswoman Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez (AOC).

Her district also includes the notorious jail on Rikers Island, where at least one prisoner has died of the virus. Hundreds have tested positive out of a total of 5,000. Many are there for parole violations or serving less than a year for low-level offenses, or are even being held in pre-trial detention and haven't been convicted, because they don't have money for bail.

AOC recently tweeted, "COVID deaths are disproportionately spike in Black + Brown communities. Why? Because of the chronic toll of redlining [around these communities], environmental racism, wealth gap etc. ARE underlying health conditions. Inequality is a co-morbidity. COVID relief should be drafted with a lens of reparations."

In a recent interview on Democracy Now, host Amy Goodman introduced Ocasio-Cortez.: "Can you talk about your district? We have heard a lot about Elmhurst Hospital. The doctors and nurses, like so may around the country, and the sanitation workers in these hospitals are not properly protected. We have not heard as much about the community that it serves. In just the last week, I've heard about three men — two Mexican brothers who died in their home, not even in the hospital, their bodies just recently taken out; a third died in the hospital — but fears of even going to hospitals, knowing what could happen to them, who have been hard-working members of our communities for so many years. Talk about your community."

REP. ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTEZ: "Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the actual community surrounding Elmhurst Hospital and Elmhurst, Queens. This is one of the most working-class and Blackest and Brownest communities in New York City. It is extraordinarily dense. Even for New York City, it is a very dense and densely populated community." It also has many undocumented workers.

"It's no surprise that in the wake of this pandemic the Trump administration announced a public charge rule that basically said if you are undocumented and seek public services, public healthcare, SNAP [food stamps], WIC [nutritional program for women, children and infants], etc., then you will be essentially put on a fast track to either denial of citizenship or outright deportation

"After we pushed the Trump administration, we were able to secure confirmation from the administration that they would not refer COVID-related cases and treat them under the public charge rule. But there's so much confusion already that many are scared to go to the hospital. These are the same people who are preparing our food. They're the same people who stock our grocery shelves. They're the same people who deliver our goods. And the idea that we can deny them care, as though the pandemic will not affect them in greater ways because of that, is naive, and it's unscientific."

There is an ironic twist to the administration's dealings with the undocumented. It is an open secret that agriculture relies on undocumented workers. These workers have now been declared part of an

“essential” business. Most have been working the fields for years and decades, are part and parcel of the U.S. population, but are denied citizenship rights.

Agrabusiness likes to keep them that way, so they have difficulty asserting their rights as workers concerning wages and working conditions, for fear of deportation – but they are now recognized as “essential” to the United States while still called “aliens” like they are from Mars.

In addition to the many protests and demonstrations by nurses, doctors and other medical workers demanding personal protective equipment, other workers who need such protection have staged wildcat strikes and protests. These include such essential workers such as those delivering food to those quarantined because they have the virus.

Grocery store workers who have to deal with large numbers of people have demanded protective equipment, and in some cases have gotten it.

Others are protesting overcrowded conditions that make contagion more likely, including in some auto plants. Some have walked out due to coworkers being tested positive.

At Amazon, workers are protesting because they have to handle very many boxes that can carry the virus from the outside, and need gloves and masks, as well as overcrowded conditions that prevent safe spacing. Jeff Bezos, one of the five richest men in the world, is the head of Amazon, and can't cough up the money to meet the workers' concerns. Amazon is one company which is profiting from the pandemic since people staying at home are turning to delivery services like Amazon.

One Black worker was fired for leading a small walkout at one of Bezos' plants. Management launched a racist campaign to discredit him in the plant, planting rumors that he was stupid and “inarticulate.”

These protests and walkouts have been small, but they indicate that anger at businesses and the government over the pandemic may portend more in the future.

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