

Children at Risk in Brazil

Category: Omicron

written by Ilana G. Ambrogi | January 3, 2022

My country—Brazil—leads the world in the worst COVID consequences. That fact is so outrageous I feel uncomfortable using the verb “lead,” as it’s usually associated with positivity. But [Brazil holds global records](#) in infection and death from SARS-CoV-2, including [maternal deaths and child and adolescent deaths](#). [“COVID killed a child aged 5 to 11 every two days in Brazil”](#) stated a recent news article based on epidemiological data. [A parliamentary investigation](#) found evidence that hundreds of thousands of deaths could have been avoided if not for decisions by politicians.

On December 16, with a new and more infectious variant circulating, the [Brazilian national drug administration](#) approved Pfizer’s COVID vaccine for children aged 5-11. Yet vaccinations, which could have started right away, didn’t. The government called for a public [plebiscite](#) regarding vaccination of children, as if scientific truth could be deposed by majority rule.

The unvaccinated, including most of the very young, are most at risk from SARS-CoV-2. Even if this variant is milder, its transmission rates are startling. Just a small percentage of a huge number can have a significant impact. Not only that, but no death is justifiable if there are known ways to prevent it. The [Brazilian Association of pediatric intensivists](#) had already warned of limited resources, human and otherwise. But Brazil’s [model national vaccination](#) program has been suffocated and dismantled by anti-science, anti-democratic, pro-death politicians. As a result, children in Brazil remain unvaccinated against COVID.

As the end-of-the-year-festivities occurred, I agonized as I read in the global news about record numbers of new COVID cases for days in a row. But when I looked at the Brazilian news, it was as if I were in a different dimension. There was a chilling quietude about COVID. The unprecedented surge in COVID worldwide due to omicron doesn’t seem to faze the media or the authorities here. My powerlessness irritates me. There is a blackout of epidemiological COVID data in Brazil. We have not much clue about COVID infections—all we hear about are [long waits](#) to be evaluated for flu symptoms.

I try to find relief in the fact that in the Southern Hemisphere, schools will be out for the summer in a month or so. And some unvaccinated children will be somewhat protected by race and class. But then I think of the hundreds of thousands of Brazilian children who are vulnerable because of racial, social, and economic inequities, and it makes my breathing tight, my mood angry again.

I want to breathe—I want everyone to breathe—with tranquility. Those most at risk, those living in the most vulnerable situations, must be at the center of our attention, efforts, and decisions. Now.

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