

Detroit-area hospitals reach capacity as coronavirus infections in Michigan surge past 2,000

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On Wednesday, two major Detroit-area hospitals—Henry Ford Health System and Beaumont Health—reported that facilities within their system had reached their capacity for treating coronavirus patients, as the number of confirmed cases in Michigan’s most populated metropolitan area continued to escalate. The total number of confirmed cases in Detroit proper reached 702 on Wednesday, contributing to a statewide total of 2,294 infections.

Michigan currently has the fifth highest number of cases in the United States behind New York, New Jersey, California and Washington.

Henry Ford Health System reached the patient limit at its Detroit and West Bloomfield hospitals and began creating additional bed space by moving patients and creating COVID-19 units at several of its other facilities in the area. The *Detroit News* reported that Chief Operating Officer Bob Riney said that “the number of inpatients with confirmed COVID-19 increased from 282 Wednesday morning to 304 as of 1:00 p.m. Wednesday.”

Riney also said Henry Ford hospitals have 107 patients with pending test results for a total of 411 patients with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 infection. The health care network has a total of five hospitals in the state and there are coronavirus patients being treated at all of them.

In addition to converting clinics at other Detroit-area facilities, Riney said they were moving other non-infected patients around to keep them from being exposed to the coronavirus.

Like every other hospital network in the US hit by the pandemic, Henry Ford Health is facing staffing issues and a shortage of personal protective equipment and mechanical ventilators and asking people in the community to help by donating supplies like face shields, face masks and disposable gowns.

Dr. Betty Chu, associate chief clinical officer, told the *Detroit News*, “Because of the lack of testing in the population ... it’s hard to anticipate the total numbers we’re going to have. We would certainly look to other health systems to take care of those patients as well, making sure we can create as much ICU capacity in our own facilities.”

Beaumont Health, Michigan’s largest hospital system, had over 500 confirmed coronavirus patients across eight hospitals as of Wednesday, with more than 200 more awaiting test results. Beaumont CEO John Fox told a Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce teleconference that approximately 100 patients were being added daily and measures were being taken to increase capacity, including converting operating rooms into COVID-19 intensive care units.

The vast majority of those infected in Michigan—1,946 or 85 percent—are from Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb counties in the Detroit metropolitan area. Of the 43 who have died from the virus in the state—an increase of 19 in one day—88 percent are also from the tri-county area. Meanwhile, the epicenter of the crisis in Michigan continues to be in the city of Detroit, with a total of 702 confirmed cases and twelve dead.

The skyrocketing numbers of patients in Detroit correlate directly to the desperate social conditions in the city. Contrary to corporate media hype about the comeback of Detroit due to downtown real estate investment and development by billionaire Dan Gilbert, living conditions for the working class throughout the city have continued to deteriorate, a process which began with the decline of the US auto industry in the 1970s.

Thousands of families in Detroit have no running water due to the extreme poverty and an aggressive shutoff policy enforced by the city’s Democratic Party

administration of Mayor Mike Duggan. The state of emergency and temporary suspension of inessential business activity by the Democratic Party Governor Gretchen Whitmer has also hit city residents the hardest.

The closure of the Detroit public schools combined with an increasing number of workers contracting COVID-19 has made the distribution of food to the city's children nearly impossible. For thousands of children in the city, their school breakfast and lunch are the only regular meals they receive each day.

The working class in Detroit is not going to sit by and allow the public health crisis to spread without taking matters into their own hands. Detroit bus drivers shut down the city's transportation system on March 17 when they staged a sick-out in defiance of both the city government and their union to demand better health and safety protections on their routes.

Auto workers in several Detroit-area assembly and stamping facilities also walked off the job forcing the auto companies to shut down production at Ford, GM and FCA facilities across the country. Two auto workers have since died after contracting COVID-19 when they were on the job before the walkouts.

Health care workers on the front lines of dealing with the life and death impact of the pandemic are also taking independent measures to provide the materials needed to care for the sick and protect themselves from the spreading disease. Click-On Detroit reported on Wednesday that nurses are using their off hours to fan out in the community and make passionate appeals for donations of needed supplies.

A nurse at a hospital in Southeast Michigan highlighted the utter lack of preparation and foresight by the healthcare administrators, including Ascension Providence and Beaumont Health. "They're not being honest with us about how this disease is being transmitted. There have been preliminary studies by the NIH with Princeton University, I believe, that indicate that the COVID-19 virus can stay three hours in the air."

She reported that a nurse at a Detroit-area hospital was told by management to remove her personal N95 mask, which she wore to work as extra protection. The hospital management initially threatened to call security but relented in the face of her steadfastness.

"The Nurse Anesthetist (NA), which means she intubates people getting ready for surgery, after she intubates a patient, she goes into a common room with several other NAs and regular Anesthesiologists. They all just sit around and wait for their next case.

"Typically, she would only wear the mask while intubating. But with everyone in the room, she did not feel comfortable sitting there unmasked with everyone else, as they are all intubating patients. I'm not sure why, but she is rotating three masks she has at home. I suspect there is a shortage of masks at the hospital."

This nurse also reported that at another hospital in the Detroit-area, hospital workers in the postpartum unit only started wearing masks two days ago. The reason given by management was that they didn't want to "spread panic" among expectant mothers.

"At my hospital, a co-worker of mine reported that a pregnant mother was admitted, and on day four she exhibited symptoms of COVID-19," she continued. "None of the workers were wearing masks. A few days later, this person was on a ventilator. They're still not wearing masks. A lot of us feel like sacrificial lambs."

The nurse confirmed that despite promises from Governor Gretchen Whitmer and others that the desperately needed protective equipment would arrive, the situation remains dire: "They should have been rallying to supply us five years ago."

Another nurse who works at a hospital in Detroit told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "The virus in Detroit is spreading the fastest in areas of the city where you have the most concentrated poverty, a lack of running water and lack of soap. Whole swathes of Detroit have no grocery stores or places where residents can get decent or nutritious food.

"People are coming into the hospital in terrible condition. They have a cough, fever and chest pains and we cannot really do anything for them except help them with breathing or intubate them.

"The virus is now morphing in Detroit and I hate to say this but things in this country could become like Italy in terms of mortality rates. A woman came into the hospital today after getting worse and worse at home for the past six days where she was told to shelter in place.

"The danger for Detroit residents is that many are in bad shape already and have underlying conditions. The body needs all its organs to fight the virus. If you have heart disease, diabetes or other problems, there is less of a chance that you can fight it off."



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