

Coronavirus death toll rising rapidly in Detroit

Kevin Reed
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The number of deaths in Detroit from the coronavirus increased by 49 percent on Monday, with 27 new fatalities bringing the total from 35 to 52. The total number of confirmed cases in the city rose to 1,801, according to data published by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

Michigan had the second largest one-day increase in COVID-19 deaths, surpassed only by the state of New York, which reported 52. Of the total number of 182 deaths in Michigan, 158, or 87 percent, are from the three most populated counties in Southeast Michigan—Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties. The total number of coronavirus cases in the tricounty area is 5,288, or 81 percent of the state's total of 6,498.

On Monday morning, Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, mentioned the growth of the pandemic in Detroit on the ABC TV program *Good Morning America*. While discussing several areas in the country with accelerating infection rates, Fauci said, "We're also worried about Detroit. Detroit is starting to show some signs that they're going to take off."

Fauci's statement came three days after US Surgeon General Jerome Adams said that Detroit is a national hotspot for the coronavirus and that the city "will have a worse week next week."

The *New York Times* published a report on the coronavirus in Detroit on Monday and quoted Dr. Howard Markel, a professor of the history of medicine and expert on epidemics at the University of Michigan. Markel said, "The city itself is underequipped. It's a perfect storm of poverty and very rudimentary public health conditions."

While the coronavirus has been spreading rapidly in Michigan, the number of tests conducted so far is a miniscule 15,282. This is in a state with a population of

10 million.

As medical experts have repeatedly explained, the lack of universal public testing is among the most significant factors in the spread of the pandemic because people who have the virus and are asymptomatic can give it to others without being aware of it.

As Dr. Teena Chopra, director of infection prevention at the Detroit Medical Center, explained to *MLive* on Monday, "You're now seeing all the consequences from the lack of testing options. If we were to start now, it may not help anymore because it's widespread in the community and a lot of damage has already been done."

"What's important is testing, testing, testing, testing as much as possible, and isolating people. The fact that the state has limited its testing to some populations has not helped us. It's made this situation worse, that we've had limited access to testing right from the beginning."

Chopra said that the United States "really dropped the ball" on its coronavirus testing response. She compared the US to countries like South Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore, which have contained the spread of coronavirus by conducting widespread testing early on. They determined who was infected and traced their contacts to make sure those contacts were quarantined.

A series of events in recent days has revealed the rapidity with which COVID-19 is expanding in Detroit and throughout the state of Michigan:

* Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan said 493 police officers, 105 civilian employees and 109 members of the Detroit Fire Department were in quarantine as of Monday. Of these, 69 police officers, including Chief James Craig, and eight firefighters have tested positive. Two Detroit police officers have died from the

coronavirus. City health officials believe the source of the infections in the department originated at a “Police and Pancakes” event in the Ninth Precinct on March 6 that drew about 100 people.

* State Representative Isaac Robinson from Michigan’s 4th District, which includes Detroit and the city of Hamtramck, died on Sunday morning at Detroit Medical Center Receiving Hospital from a suspected coronavirus infection. After he had experienced breathing problems over a period of days, Robinson’s mother called EMS, and he was transported to the hospital at 6:00 a.m. By 11:00 that morning he was pronounced dead.

* On Saturday, a 25-year-old chemical engineering student at Western Michigan University died after contracting the coronavirus. He had been denied testing multiple times even though he had a fever, fatigue and shortness of breath. Bassey Offiong was eventually hospitalized at Beaumont Health Hospital in Royal Oak. He was placed on a ventilator in intensive care for one week before he died. Bassey’s sister, Asari Offiong, told the *Detroit News* that her brother had no known prior health issues and was told by at least one medical location that he had bronchitis.

* Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer is expected to sign an executive order that will officially close all public and private K-12 schools in the state for the remainder of the school year. This includes the shutting down of all school buildings. Districts may continue to offer distance learning programs, but high school seniors will graduate, and kindergarten through eleventh grade students will advance to the next grade at the beginning of the next school year. The state will continue to provide funding to the districts as long as they pay school employees through the end of the official school year on June 30.

* Governor Whitmer issued an executive order giving judges greater flexibility in releasing inmates from Michigan prisons, as the number of inmates with coronavirus continues to expand. A total of 58 inmates had confirmed cases of COVID-19 as of Sunday, a doubling of the number over the weekend. The majority of the cases are at the Parnall Correctional Facility in Jackson and the Macomb Correctional Facility north of Detroit. Eleven staff members at the Michigan Department of Corrections have also tested positive.



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