

Arkansas continues to be ravaged by COVID-19

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Last week Arkansas' confirmed cases of coronavirus increased by 3,227, bringing the total number of confirmed cases in the state to 19,818. The state government has been pressing forward with reopening the economy at the expense of worker safety even as confirmed cases have been rising.

Over the weekend, Republican Governor Asa Hutchinson has issued no statement on the dramatic increase in cases, nor on the 264 predominantly working class people who have been sacrificed in the name of "saving the economy."

Yesterday, the Arkansas Department of Health reported three new coronavirus deaths in Benton and Washington counties for June 27. In total, Benton County—the birthplace of retail giant Walmart—has 18 confirmed COVID-19 deaths and 2,573 confirmed cases, while in neighboring Washington County, 27 deaths have been confirmed out of a current total of 3,238 cases.

An American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) report grading all 50 state governments' handling of the pandemic in prisons and jails, gave Arkansas a failing grade of F+. The report, titled "Failing Grades: States' Responses to COVID-19 in Jails & Prisons," found that "state responses ranged from disorganized or ineffective to just callously nonexistent. The data reveals that no state has done enough and that all states failed to implement a cohesive, system-wide response to protect and save lives."

As of June 22, nearly 600 prisoners and more than 50 correctional officers and staff have been infected—the worst outbreaks so far have occurred in prisons, along with meatpacking and processing plants. The ACLU suggests that states must reduce "the footprint of their criminal legal system for the sake of public health and racial justice." Regarding the grading system, other

states with an F+ grade include Alabama, California, Georgia, Kansas and Oklahoma—states governed by both Democrats and Republicans. No states received an A, B or C grade, according to the report.

On Friday, Arkansas Secretary of Health Dr. Nate Smith said of the new cases, nine were in correctional facilities and 669 were in the community, to which Hutchinson followed up with an acknowledgement of this being "the largest increase in community spread." According to Smith, on Friday there are 5,707 active cases.

Continuing his remarks, Hutchinson said the counties with the largest number of new cases are Washington County with 122, for a total of 3,238, Pulaski County with 84 (tot. 1,810), Benton County with 68, (tot. 2,573), Sebastian County with 33 (tot. 378), Faulkner County with 31 (tot. 409), Crittenden County with 26 (tot. 696), and Pope County with 22 (tot. 402). The rest of the counties are reported to have had fewer than 20 new cases.

Dr. Smith said out of the 5,707 active cases, 108 are in nursing homes, 621 are in correctional facilities and 4,978 are community cases. From Thursday to Friday, 22 health care workers tested positive for the disease. Officials stated there were no new hospitalizations as a result.

Dr. Smith also had stated that 63 people are on ventilators in Arkansas due to the virus, three less than the previous day, Thursday. Officials stated 6,897 people were tested Thursday, bringing the state's total testing to 148,380 for the month of June.

Governor Hutchinson presented statistics of people in hospitals across the state afflicted with COVID-19: northwest Arkansas, 123 patients filling 43 percent of beds; central Arkansas, 105 at 37 percent; southwest Arkansas, 23 at 8 percent; northeast Arkansas, 28 at 9

percent; and southeast Arkansas, 5 at 1 percent.

Hutchinson also presented statistics on those in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU): northwest Arkansas, 58 COVID-19 patients in an ICU filling 44 percent of capacity; central Arkansas, 43 at 33 percent capacity; southwest Arkansas, 18 at 13 percent capacity; northeast Arkansas, 2 at 1 percent capacity; and southeast Arkansas, 9 at 6 percent capacity.

Hutchinson stated there are many churches that have experienced coronavirus outbreaks. Though some churches have temporarily stopped in-person services to prevent the spread, the state has seen many churches refusing to implement the guidelines set forth by the Arkansas Department of Health. The governor said he “will not regulate what churches do,” and that he will just make “suggestions as to what is best for churchgoers.”

Nearly 0.66 percent of the state’s population of 3,018,000 has been confirmed infected with the coronavirus. This is set to hit 1 percent, or 30,000 people, in the coming weeks. The rate at which infections are occurring in the workplace, churches, restaurants, etc., indicates that the reopening of Arkansas’ economy has not only been ineffective, but deadly.



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