

Southeastern US experiencing harrowing rise in coronavirus infections

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15 July 2020

More than 3.5 million Americans have been infected by the coronavirus and more than 139,000 have died. The Southeastern states have seen sharp spikes in the rates of infection, hospitalization, and death due to the coronavirus in the last month and a half. Young or old, black or white, COVID-19 knows no boundaries. The outbreak poses particular risk to meat processing and factory workers, teachers and students, and hospital staff.

From June 1 to July 10, South Carolina reported a mortifying 436.5 percent increase in newly reported cases in the 21-30-year-old age group. Dr. Joan Duwve, director of public health for the Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) has reported that 42 percent of the coronavirus cases in South Carolina to date have been reported in the past two weeks. The state reports a 75 percent ICU bed utilization rate along with a 25 percent utilization rate of ventilators. Coronavirus patients represent less than 20 percent of all hospitalizations, yet they utilize the greatest amount of resources.

Duwve also noted that 22 percent of COVID-19 cases in the state are among young people. She further observed that 15 percent of the cases in the state are in people 20 years old or younger. In addition to the continued rise in confirmed infections, currently at 60,389, the state witnessed its first child death Saturday, with a 5-year-old succumbing to COVID-19.

On Tuesday, the Mississippi Department of Health (MSDH) reported 862 new cases and 23 additional deaths. The MSDH reports that 805 Mississippians are currently hospitalized across the state with coronavirus infections, an increase of 119 from the previous high of 686 reported on July 9.

Mississippi reported 1,092 cases on June 25, the highest one-day total in the state during the pandemic.

On July 9, State Department of Health Officer Dr. Thomas Dobbs stated that Intensive Care Units (ICU) in five of the state's 122 hospitals were full. As of Friday, there was a total of 109 outbreaks in long-term care facilities; 2,927 residents in those facilities have been diagnosed with COVID-19, with 586 deaths.

The state's current total of coronavirus cases is 37,542 with 1,272 deaths. The highest concentration of cases has been in the Jackson metro area and in north Mississippi, near Memphis, Tennessee. Hinds County, the state's most populous county, has the highest number of cases at 3,102, closely tailed by Desoto County with 2,050 confirmed cases. Madison County ranks third with 1,560 confirmed cases. Mississippians aged 60-69 make up the largest number of hospitalizations with 777. Those aged 70-79 make up the largest number of deaths with 325 as of July 10.

Meanwhile, Arkansas has a current total of 29,733 cases of coronavirus and 323 deaths. The hospital system in Arkansas is being stretched to its limits on resources and bed occupancy. A report published by Harvard Global Health Institute predicts that demand for hospital beds will be 156 percent greater than what is currently available at the pandemic's peak in Little Rock, the state's capital and largest city, concluding that demand will overwhelm ICU capacity.

A 2018 census found that Little Rock had 4,850 hospital beds available, in which 55 percent were occupied, leaving 2,170 bed available. The bed count included 520 beds in ICU, as reported by the American Hospital Association and American Hospital Directory. With a population of about 1.6 million, and infection and fatality rates on the rise, and a strain of resources, hospitals in the city are soon to exceed maximum capacity.

In Alabama, 57,255 people are confirmed to have

contracted COVID-19 and 1,164 have died. The number of confirmed cases has been rising by more than 1,000 for the last week. In a dire warning for the state of the healthcare system, Alabama Hospital Association President Dr. Don Williamson asserted, “Right now, we’re managing it. But you know, with 200 ICU beds, with 1,100 plus patients with COVID in the hospital, with 1,700 adult medicine beds, we can cope with where we are now. What we can’t cope with is the sustained increase in the number of patients.”

The Tennessee Department of Health (TDOH) reported an additional 1,514 cases on Monday, bringing the state's total to 66,788. TDOH officials also included in their report 38,272 recoveries, 767 deaths, and 3,378 hospitalizations.

On Friday, ICU beds were at over 80 percent occupancy, while on July 8, that number was at 75 percent occupancy, and 72 percent on July 7. In addition to ICU beds decreasing in availability, overall available hospital bed occupancy increased from 73 percent on July 7 to 82 percent on Friday.

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) reports that 89,484 people in the state have tested positive for the coronavirus, with 1,552 deaths and 1,109 hospitalizations. According to the NCDHHS, 78 percent of ICU beds were occupied as of Friday, for which the total of hospitalizations in the state sat at 1,046, surpassing the previous record of 1,034 reported at the day before, marking the fifth record-breaking day in a row.

The Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) recorded the second highest single-day increase on Friday, seeing 2,600 new cases. This was the highest increase of cases in a 14-day observational period. As hospitalizations continue to rise, increasing from 75 to 1,362 people, 146 patients in the state are now on ventilators. The LDH reported a total of 82,042 cases Tuesday—an increase of 7,346 from Thursday—along with 3,337 deaths since the first cases were diagnosed in March.

On Tuesday, the Georgia Department of Public Health (GDPH) reported 123,963 confirmed cases of coronavirus, a 9,562 increase from Sunday, 2,662 ICU admissions, and 3,054 deaths. The number of available hospital beds to treat critically ill patients afflicted with COVID-19 is dropping across the state as more and more cases are reported. Statewide, 13,685 people are

currently hospitalized due to COVID-19.

The Associated Press reported Thursday that 82 percent of Georgia’s hospital ICU beds are currently in use. As of Thursday, the hospitals in Columbus, Georgia’s Region I had less than 10 critical care beds available.

Florida is now one of the main epicenters for the outbreak in the United States and globally with 291,629 total confirmed cases with 4,409 deaths reported by the Florida Department of Health. The state’s Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA), which updates the data in real time, reported on July 10 that 6,974 patients were hospitalized statewide with a “primary diagnosis of [COVID-19].”

Furthermore, on the same day, the AHCA dashboard reported that there were only 917 ICU beds available. With a population of 21.48 million, hospitals across the state will not be able to accommodate a large influx of new patients. In Miami-Dade County, 1,578 patients were hospitalized with a primary diagnosis of COVID-19, with those in critical condition taking up 87 percent of the county’s ICU beds.

The explosive increase in cases of COVID-19 throughout the Southeast is attributable to the premature push to reopen the economy by state governors, following the lead of President Donald Trump, along with hostile work conditions conducive to the spread of the virus. The Midwest Center for Investigative Reporting has tied 7,185 cases of coronavirus directly to poultry titan Tyson foods, based in Springdale, Arkansas. At least 24 Tyson workers have died of COVID-19. In addition, a large contributing factor to the rapid spread of the disease is the lack of proper personal protective equipment.



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