

US posts a one-day high in COVID-19 cases with health systems on the verge of collapse

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With the United States leading the way as the worst-affected country, the number of coronavirus cases and deaths worldwide continues to soar, reaching 14 million infections today, and threatening to reach 600,000 total deaths by tomorrow. Yesterday, 5,736 more people succumbed to COVID-19, according to the Worldometer tracker.

Three countries, Brazil, India and the United States, account for more than 50 percent of all new cases. Yesterday, the United States posted its highest one-day number of new cases with 73,388 and 963 fatalities, approaching 3.7 million cases, with 141,000 deaths.

Almost alone among major countries, the United States has significant sections of its political elite who are acting as open advocates of spreading the virus so that the population will be forced to achieve “herd immunity,” regardless of the cost in human lives.

This is the *de facto* policy of the capitalist ruling classes all over the world. But few have gone as far publicly as Georgia Governor Brian Kemp, a Republican allied with President Trump, who issued an executive order that combines pigheaded stupidity and criminal indifference to public health. It forbids city governments in his state to require the wearing of masks by people who are out in public places.

Perverting the slogan of “individual freedom,” Kemp explicitly singled out cities like Atlanta, Savannah, Athens and Augusta, whose mask requirements are now rescinded. Kemp upholds the “right” of the “free individual” to contract COVID-19 and then pass it on to friends, relatives, workmates, and people passing by in the street, without imposing the “heavy hand of government” through requiring a simple facemask.

Earlier in the month, over 1,400 health care workers signed a letter warning the governor that the state was ill-prepared to face a surge of new cases. Georgia reported 3,871 new cases on Thursday. At Navicent Health, the largest health care system in the state, a health worker told Georgia Public Broadcast News, “They were lined up along the walls in the ER ... when you have to start shipping patients out of state, it’s bad. When the hospitals are full,

that’s when it becomes really dangerous for everybody.”

Not only Georgia, but Florida, Alabama, Texas, Arizona and California are seeing a continuous influx of patients into emergency rooms. Except for California, these states are recording positivity rates in their COVID-19 testing above 15 percent with Arizona at 24 percent. These figures demonstrate that the pandemic is spreading uncontrollably through the population as a consequence of weeks of reopening businesses and encouraging people to resume normal activities and drop their guard against the killer virus.

Alabama's Lieutenant Governor Will Ainsworth publicly rebuked Governor Kay Ivey's statewide mandate to wear masks in public for a month. “The mandate is an overstep that infringes upon the property rights of business owners and the ability of individuals to make their own health decisions,” he declared.

Meanwhile, the number of cases in the state has exploded since the end of June. On Wednesday, Alabama reported its largest single day of deaths from COVID-19 with 47 fatalities. The Alabama Department of Corrections announced the death of two inmates on the same day. Thirty-four inmates have tested positive since July 10. Also, a COVID-19 outbreak at Alabama's largest food bank, serving 35 counties and over 300,000 residents, threatens their operations.

Louisiana reported 2,280 new cases of COVID-19 with 24 deaths. The demand for testing is skyrocketing, and the state is moving to cut back the number of tests available at community testing sites to preserve a critical supply, limiting them to people with COVID-19 symptoms. This is leading to delays in reporting, which many epidemiologists have noted confounds the ability to contact trace.

According to a recent 55-page report released by the Rockefeller Foundation, “America faces an impending disaster. The extraordinary scale of COVID-19 crisis is evident in the growing deaths and economic losses the pandemic has wrought in every state.” The report states that the US needs to reach the ability to perform 30 million tests

a week with a turnaround time of 48 hours. Presently, the US is conducting 4.5 million COVID-19 tests a week with many patients having to wait more than seven days to get results. Mara Aspinall, a professor at Arizona State University and co-author of the report, said, “This is just unacceptable because, by the time you get test results back, you've already infected many, many people.”

Many health professionals and public health officials have called for another lockdown to gain breathing room to deal with the growing crisis in earnest. However, the Trump administration and state governors, Democrat and Republican alike, are opposed to such measures. Even in Texas, where the state is facing a collapse of its healthcare infrastructure, Governor Greg Abbott walked back his assertion from last week that “the next step would have to be a lockdown.” He told KRIV-TV in Houston emphatically, “Let me tell you, there is no shutdown coming.”

On July 14, Texas posted a one-day high of 10,751 new cases. On July 15, it also grimly noted 110 new deaths, its highest one-day toll since the beginning of the pandemic. Meanwhile, several hard-hit counties in Texas are bringing in freezer trucks as makeshift morgues. ICUs and hospitals are attempting to find room in their facilities that are brimming with patients. Ambulances are on bypass or have to hold patients in their cabins for several hours before a bed is located for them. Many of these new COVID-19 patients come from low-income populations who have to work with their hands and suffer from chronic diabetes and high blood pressure.

Though the number of cases in Arizona seems to have plateaued, 90 percent of hospital beds are in use, and with the scarcity of resources, there is rationing of medical care. Dr. Murtaza Akhter, an emergency room medicine physician at Valleywise Health Medical Center in Phoenix, said, “The fear is we are going to have to start sharing ventilators, or we're gonna have to start saying, 'you get a vent, you don't!' I'd be really surprised if, in a couple of weeks, we didn't have to do that.”

Several counties in southern California are also facing shortages of resources for COVID-19 patients. Like his Republican counterparts, Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom is putting into place half measures, closing some businesses and issuing a statewide mask mandate. Cases in the state of Washington are also on the rise. Since the middle of June, Washington has seen more than 700 new cases each day.

The pandemic’s impact would be multiplied many times over if states go ahead with plans to reopen public school systems in August and September, bringing 50 million children into an environment where they will be unable to social distance and otherwise protect themselves from

infection, which will spread to teachers and other school staff, and will go home to parents, grandparents and other caregivers.

President Trump has threatened to cut funding from schools if they don’t open. Asked by the press about his response to an Arizona teacher who contracted COVID-19 at a summer school and died, Trump seemed to feel nothing, and reiterated his demand that all schools reopen for five-day, in-person instruction. This is demanded by corporate America, in order to push through the back-to-work drive against the resistance of the working class.

The Democrats seek to profit politically from Trump’s obvious indifference to sickness and death, as well as the sheer incompetence of the White House response, but they represent the same class interests. No prominent Democrat is calling for a second national lockdown to stop the virus transmission and use the opportunity to begin the implementation of a broad public health initiative that would include mass testing, contact tracing and isolation of those who test positive.

According to a Reuters/Ipsos opinion poll, only one in four Americans believes it would be safe to reopen schools this fall, while more than half felt such a move would be dangerous. Forty percent of parents polled said they would probably keep their children home if classes are back in session.

At Monday’s World Health Organization briefing, Dr. Mike Ryan replied as follows to a question on school openings, in words that apply most directly to the United States: “The problem we have in some countries right now is that it is very difficult to determine the safety of any environment because there is just so much transmission going on that all potential environments that people mix are essentially problematic … There are real issues in how schools can be reopened safely, but the best and safest way to reopen schools is in the context of low community transmission that has been effectively suppressed by a broad-based comprehensive strategy … Schools are a hugely important part of this. They are a hugely important part of our social, educational architecture. They are the baseline of our civilization, but we can’t turn schools into yet another political football in this game.”



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