

US hits record 74,987 new daily COVID-19 cases

Benjamin Mateus
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The United States posted a record 74,987 new cases of COVID-19 Friday, amid a massive resurgence of the pandemic throughout the country. Forty-two states have seen a rise in cases over two weeks and only Maine and Delaware have demonstrated a decline.

The number of COVID-19 cases internationally has swiftly and silently passed 14 million. Nearly 600,000 people have paid the price with their lives, all due to the criminal negligence of political leaders who are more beholden to the financial oligarchs' drive to further enrich themselves than to ensuring the safety and livelihood of billions of working people who toil every day to eke out a living.

Yesterday saw a one-day high of 249,233 new cases with 5,747 deaths. Brazil reported more than 2 million cases of COVID-19 since the pandemic began, while India had the dubious honor of being the third nation to exceed 1 million cases. The US, Brazil and India combined account for nearly half of all global cases, with the United States representing 26.6 percent.

Florida, with 327,241 cases of COVID-19, third highest in the country, reported 13,965 new cases on Thursday and a one-day high of 156 fatalities. The state has had more than 100 deaths four days running. To place the catastrophe in context, the *Orlando Sentinel* wrote, "If coronavirus were a hurricane, it seemed to reach category five status over the weekend. More than ever, Florida needs decisive, resolute guidance to get through this storm." The number of deaths on Thursday surpassed all the direct fatalities from all the hurricanes over the last two decades.

Texas also set a one-day high of 154 fatalities and the third day in a row of deaths above 100. Governor Greg Abbott has walked back his position to lock down the state, joining other Republican and Democratic governors to mandate unenforced and unenforceable

mask policies. The defiance by many stems from the politicization of the pandemic and mistrust engendered in the advice provided by public health officials and the scientific community in general.

Texas has also exceeded 300,000 cases, bringing it to fourth place. Statewide, more than 3,637 people have died. Kinsa data, a company that uses internet-based technology to track thermometer readings, shows that the rate of COVID-19 infections is moving fastest in Texas. According to the company, "This level of sustained, rampant disease transmission suggests that there is likely a lot more illness in the community than what has been reflected in the case numbers to date." Though yesterday saw a plateauing of cases with a drop in statewide COVID-19 hospitalizations, the situation is only growing more dire.

States like Georgia, Alabama, South Carolina and Oklahoma are facing the same predicament as Arizona, Texas and Florida, which moved to open their communities to business and commerce earlier. Tulsa, Oklahoma voiced concerns on Thursday about ICU capacity. The Oklahoma State University Medical Center in downtown Tulsa has opened its COVID-19 ward to its first sets of patients since the Army Corp of Engineers built it last spring. St. Francis hospital informed the local Fox News channel that the current influx in patients would become unsustainable soon if the surge was not halted. Hillcrest Hospital issued a statement: "Today, our ICU bed capacity is at 90 percent full, and we consistently run at 90 to 95 percent across our metro hospitals."

However, as the surge has become more entrenched, the White House has issued a directive to bypass the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in collecting the critical data on hospitalizations and report the information to state departments or via a

private portal that relays the data directly to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The use of the portal is also tied to access to the federally supplied drug Remdesivir. The fiasco of the nation's inability to create the necessary infrastructure for rapid and broad testing will now be made worse by hiding the impact of the virus on community health care facilities.

In Kansas and Missouri, where cases are rising, according to NPR, the hospital data has suddenly gone missing or is incomplete. The Kansa Hospital Association notified its health department that its hospital data would be delayed, while the Missouri Hospital Association explained that it no longer has access to data it uses to guide its mitigation efforts. The spokesperson for the Missouri Hospital Association said that "all evidence suggests that Missouri's numbers are headed in the wrong direction. And, for now, we will have very limited situational awareness. That's all very bad news."

The Democrats have sent letters to the White House, the Coronavirus Taskforce, and HHS Secretary Azar demanding that access to the data be restored. However, these toothless efforts are intended only to win favor with their electorates. There is no serious policy to bring a real solution to the pandemic, as it would require placing the fragile economy back into lockdown, with all that implies for the financial markets. It should be underscored that on this issue, the Democrats and Republicans are united.

Meanwhile, according to the *Wall Street Journal*, the US labor market recovery is losing its momentum as the surge in cases has led to uncertainties among employers and worries among consumers.

Concerns among health care workers are once again turning to the shortage in personal protective equipment (PPE) used by nurses and physicians to treat patients at hospitals and clinics safely. PPE demand in June climbed 176 percent in Arizona, 224 percent in California, 237 percent in Texas and 240 percent in Florida, according to the *Financial Times*.

Ali Raja, a co-founder of the volunteer organization #GetUsPPE and an emergency room physician, said, "I've heard from my friends in hospitals in Houston, where they're wearing raincoats and ponchos instead of hospital gowns... We hear a lot from folks who are telling us that they're just making do without because

they have patients who are ill and need to be cared for."

There is now much hope being placed on a vaccine that could provide immunity to the population. Moderna published the results of its phase one trial this week and is expected to launch its phase three trial soon. Yet the struggle to find a treatment for the coronavirus is spinning into another point of national antagonism.

A recent preprint study by the Department of Infectious Diseases, King's College London, followed patients after COVID-19 infection, measuring their antibody titers over time. It writes that "in individuals that only develop modest antibody titers following infection, titers become undetectable or are approaching baseline after 50 days, highlighting the transient nature of the antibody response towards SARS-CoV-2 in some individuals." It is known that coronavirus infections tend to produce short-lived immunity. This--assessing titer levels of its subjects over time--will be one facet of analysis for the Moderna vaccine trial.

Given concerns that herd immunity is potentially a flawed construct biologically with SARS-CoV-2, the push to open schools at a time when the seasonality of the virus also has become an issue of debate may create a perfect storm scenario.



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