Eighty-five infants infected with COVID-19 in Corpus Christi, Texas

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Eight-five infants under the age of one have tested positive for the coronavirus in Nueces County, Texas. The county, which includes Corpus Christi, has seen the number of new cases skyrocket in July after seeing a slight flattening trend. The virus has infected dozens of babies, including the death on July 6 of a baby of less than six months old.

The director of public health for Nueces County, Annette Rodriguez, told CNN on Saturday, “We currently have 85 babies under the age of one year in Nueces County that all have tested positive for COVID-19” and “these babies have not even had their first birthday yet.” She urged, “Please help us stop the spread of this disease.”

Nueces County, on the Gulf of Mexico, has seen a rise in cases and deaths in July in the wake of the reopening, with 2,416 cases and 9 deaths at the beginning of the month, compared to 8,407 cases and 90 deaths as of Saturday, an increase in cases of over 300 percent and deaths by 1,000 percent. This is in a county with a total population of approximately 326,000, meaning that about 2.6 percent of the total population has been infected, twice the infection rate of the United States, which stands at 1.2 percent.

In Corpus Christi, as of Saturday a total of 90 people had died from COVID-19, although this is most likely an undercount due to shortages in testing. According to city numbers, the 7-day averaged daily case was 26 a month ago. As of Saturday, it stood at 236, for a 14-fold increase in daily cases.

The total number of people who have died in Texas stood at 3,865 as of Saturday, far surpassing the 2,977 deaths from 9/11 terrorist attacks, with a new grim record of 174 deaths on Friday alone. Out of the 254 counties in the state, only 5 have reported no COVID-19 cases.

Stretches of South Texas have seen coronavirus infections spread so quickly in recent weeks that local hospitals are being pushed to their limit. The four-county region in the Rio Grande Valley and the Coastal Bend has just 21 ICU beds still available for a population of about 1.4 million people, according to the latest state data. Ambulance operators describe wait times of up to 10 hours to deliver patients to overflowing emergency rooms.

In the Coastal Bend region, which includes Corpus Christi, a trauma service division managed by the Regional Advisory Council reports hospital bed usage is upwards of 80 percent and Intensive Care Unit (ICU) beds are completely full. Health professionals and scientists have warned that this causes an increase in deaths from other ailments and diseases that otherwise would be treated, as patients are turned away as ICU and ER beds are overwhelmed.

Nueces County Medical Examiner Adel Shaker has requested an additional refrigerated truck to store bodies, as the county’s existing morgue is full. The mobile morgue was scheduled to arrive on Saturday. The county has also written to the Texas Division of Emergency Management asking for additional staffing, personal protective equipment and the construction of field hospitals.

The governor of Texas, Republican Greg Abbott, as recently as July 16 signaled his commitment not to impose a new lockdown. Abbott told KPRC-TV in Houston on Wednesday that it seems like people ask him about a shutdown “like a thousand times a day.”

“People are panicking, thinking I’m about to shut down Texas again,” he said. “The answer is no. That is not the goal. I’ve been abundantly clear.” Abbott is touting measures he’s taken in recent weeks, including a statewide mask mandate and an order shutting down

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bars. He said it will take a few weeks to see a reversal to the surge in coronavirus cases.

On Thursday, Abbott defended his response to the coronavirus at a virtual Texas Republican convention after acknowledging widespread discontent among party members who have criticized even the governor's mask mandate. "The last thing that any of us want is to lock Texas back down again," he said during the convention.

Abbott is trying to shift the blame for the rise in cases on young people, whom he blames for not wearing masks. This claim is obviously false given the fact that people have been infected at places, such as bars and restaurants, that should have been closed under a lockdown.

The news of the infections of infants in Corpus Christi is particularly concerning. The specific literature from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on COVID-19 in infants states that transmission is thought to "occur primarily through respiratory droplets during the postnatal period," though there are concerns that it may spread during birth or late pregnancy. It also states that "data suggest that infants (less than 12 months of age) may be at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 compared with older children," though the information is not conclusive.

The CDC states that there are complications reported with COVID-19 in infants, and that in a minority of infants "severe disease requiring mechanical ventilation has been reported in COVID-19 positive neonates [infants who were just born]."

The infection of infants exposes the criminality of the Texas government's efforts to reopen, and the reopening efforts throughout the US and globally, where workers are told that their children will be safe being sent back to school and daycare. This is combined with the failure to heed the warnings of scientists and health professionals, who have warned against premature re-openings, and emphasized the need for massive testing, treatment and the closing of all nonessential businesses.

Given recent revelations on the many complications and additional symptoms from the virus, such as widespread blood clotting, liver failure and, in children, Kawasaki-like disease, it is a fair to conclude that sending children back to schools and daycare, where the virus would spread like wildfire, will not be safe for children or infants. The longevity of the effects of the disease are unknown, and may prove to be long term or permanent, much in the same way as polio left people crippled long after being treated.

On July 14, the White House Coronavirus Task Force designated almost half of the counties in Texas as "red zones," or counties that have at least 10 percent of tests coming back positive. Roughly 4 in 5 people in Texas live in these zones. The task force document suggests "red zones" should close nonessential businesses and limit gatherings to less than 10. These modest demands will most certainly fall on deaf ears as the state government, following the Trump administration's lead, has repeatedly asserted that it will take no serious measures to fight the virus.

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