

US coronavirus hospitalizations surge back to April highs

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Hospitalizations in the US caused by the coronavirus pandemic have for the past three days remained above 59,000, matching the previous highs seen during the surge in April, according to data from the Covid Tracking Project. The spike in hospitalizations is the result of infections surging nationally, including more than 69,000 new cases today along with 1,150 deaths, bringing the total known case count and death toll to 4.17 million and 147,000, respectively.

In April, the virus was largely concentrated in New York City, which was an epicenter of the disease outbreak in the US and internationally. Now, the epicenter of the pandemic in the US could be described as the entire South, with particularly large spikes in Florida and Texas, as well as in California. Those three states make up about 42 percent of the total new cases and 45 percent of new deaths. Florida, in particular, set a record for new deaths in the state, at 173, largely centered in Pinellas, Palm Beach, Hillsborough, Orange, Miami-Dade and Escambia counties.

Florida, California and Texas also have the most current hospitalizations of any state. There are 9,422 in Florida, 8,820 in California (including 2,284 in intensive care units), and 10,893 in Texas (with 3,329 in ICUs). Florida does not report how many of its coronavirus patients are in intensive care units. There are also 3,157 people in Georgia currently hospitalized and 2,966 in Arizona. Ten other states have at least 1,000 patients in hospitals, with hundreds in each state under intensive care.

The situation is equally grim internationally. There are 15.6 million reported cases of COVID-19 worldwide, along with nearly 635,600 deaths. For the past two days there have been more than a quarter of a million new cases and, on average, more than 5,000 new deaths. Both trends have been rising since late

May, as national lockdowns that had to some extent suppressed the virus' transmission were ended and workers were forced back onto the job.

India for the second day in a row is posting a record number of new cases, 48,446, as well as 755 new deaths. Brazil reported 58,080 new cases, second only to the day before, and 1,317 new deaths.

Spain is facing the threat of a second wave of the pandemic. After keeping its daily new case numbers below 500 for most of June and the first week of July, it has now reported at least 1,000 new cases for the past seven days, and a related rise in deaths is expected to follow.

As the virus has exploded out of control in the United States, President Donald Trump has resumed his daily coronavirus press briefings, the last of which he personally attended in April. The president focused a great deal during the past week on his "strategy to safely reopen schools," which revolve around claims that because children are less prone to dying from the virus, they should be sent into packed and often poorly ventilated buildings for hours at a time while a pandemic still rages.

Dismissing the dangers posed, he asserted that there "is nothing in this country more important than keeping our people safe," while at the same time posing as the most fervent fighter against the "China virus" and the "radical left mob you see in Portland."

The real aim of getting students back to school was signaled moments later, when Trump again decried another "shutdown" as something that would lead to "irreversible harm"--not harm to human life, but to the "economy," which "we have to get going." Trump cited higher housing prices as an indicator of the strength of the economy, making no mention of the 1.4 million new unemployed and the more than 30 million

continuing unemployed in the country. Trump's "big numbers" refer solely to the soaring Dow Jones, which ended yesterday above 26,600.

The president then emphasized, "Reopening our schools is also critical to ensuring parents can go to work and provide for their families." He continued: "The Council of Economic Advisors estimates that 5.6 million parents will be unable to return to work if schools do not reopen this year."

In other words, children need to go back to school so corporations can extract profit from their parents' labor.

The risks are further underscored by the state of testing in the United States. While Trump has repeatedly bragged that the US has done more tests than any other country in the world (untrue: China has performed 90 million tests to 51 million in the US), multiple reports and comments from top US health officials indicate that testing sites in the country are being overwhelmed by the rising case count in the country.

While the US is currently reporting the results of more than 770,000 tests each day, there is a lag time of 3-10 days or more between when a person is tested and when he or she gets the results. When asked about the state of testing by MSNBC, Assistant Secretary for Health Brett Giroir was forced to admit that even after six months of the pandemic in the US, "there still needs to be a reduced turnaround time." Giroir also claimed that by September the US would be able to do 65 million tests per month, two to three times the current rate.

He did however note that the average turnaround time for commercial labs is 4.27 days. As a result, it is much harder to have efficient contact tracing and tracking to actually contain the spread of the virus.

These comments were echoed in an interview on Tuesday by leading infectious disease expert Anthony Fauci, who told CNN that "if you don't know if that person gets their results back early... that kind of really mitigates getting a good tracing and good isolation."

The turnaround time is not merely, however, contingent on the rise in the number of cases. As Fauci noted, anyone who meets the president must get tested using one of the many faster "point-of-care" tests. These are not, however, widely available in the United States because of their cost. Instead, workers are forced

to rely on labs run by companies such as Quest Diagnostics and Laboratory Corporation of America, which have seen their stock prices rise by billions even as they take days or sometimes weeks to return a test, making them all but useless.



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