

Hurricane Hanna hits regions of Texas and Mexico devastated by COVID-19

Trévon Austin
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Hurricane Hanna, the first hurricane of the Atlantic season, made landfall on Padre Island late Saturday afternoon, according to the National Hurricane Center. Weakening rapidly after it hit land, now Tropic Storm Hannah continues to batter southern Texas and northeast Mexico with high winds and heavy rain, regions already devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Prior to Hanna's landfall, the National Hurricane Center issued a storm surge warning for a section of the Texas coast ranging from Port Mansfield to Mesquite Bay. Widespread flooding was reported along the coast with an average of 4-6 inches of rainfall, but some areas have seen as much as a foot of rain. The energy provider in the region reported more than 90,000 homes were without power in the region at the time of this writing.

Areas across southern Texas expected an additional 5-10 inches of rainfall throughout Sunday morning, although some localized areas saw up to 18 inches of water. Meteorologists warned that the Rio Grande Valley was especially susceptible to severe flooding. Texas Governor Greg Abbott said flooding in the region was expected to be "life-threatening." Abbott issued a disaster declaration for 32 counties directly in the path of Hanna and has requested federal aid.

Tamaulipas and Nuevo Leon, Mexico's most northeastern states took a significant hit from the storm as well. Francisco Cabeza de Vaca, Tamaulipas' governor, tweeted that the state had prepared shelters and implemented disinfecting measures to avoid spreading the coronavirus. Additionally, Mexico's civil protection department sent rescue boats and other equipment to Nuevo Leon in anticipation of heavy rains.

In Matamoros, Mexico, just across the border from

Brownsville, Texas, immigrant advocates worried about the hurricane's impact on a makeshift migrant camp near the Rio Grande where approximately 1,300 asylum seekers lived. The migrants, including newborns and elderly, have been forced to wait in Mexico under the Trump administration's "Remain in Mexico" immigration policy.

Before Hurricane Hanna landed, Abbott reminded Texans of the dismal state of the COVID-19 outbreak. The situation could worsen in the face of a natural disaster displacing people from their homes.

"Any hurricane is an enormous challenge," Abbott said in a Saturday news conference. "This challenge is complicated and made even more severe seeing that it is sweeping through an area that is the most challenged area in the state for COVID-19."

Abbott mustered seventeen COVID-19 mobile response teams and 1,000 medical personnel from the Texas National Guard to send to the area. Emergency resources were dispatched to the Rio Grande Valley and Coastal Bend region. These two areas are among those most devastated by COVID-19.

South Texas has been of particular concern to medical officials. During the first two weeks of July, the area recorded more than 2,000 new coronavirus infections each week. In Nueces County, home to Corpus Christi, at least 2 percent of the population was infected prior to the storm. As people cramp into shelters to stay safe from flooding, experts expect a rise in cases in the region.

The virus did not always have such a staggering presence in the region. Before April 30, when Texas' stay-at-home order was allowed to expire, Nueces County only reported fewer than 100 cases and three deaths. However, Memorial Day celebrations, encouraged by Donald Trump, saw droves of people

gather in the popular beachfront communities on Texas' coast. Now, the region is experiencing a spike in cases.

Just last Friday, an infant less than six months old tested positive for COVID-19 and died soon after. Earlier this week, an intubated COVID-19 patient had to be flown some 700 miles, from Harlingen to Amarillo, due to a severe lack of ICU beds in the area.

The South Texas Health System, already inundated with a surge of sick and dying patients, tried to send the patient to closer facilities but the Northwest Texas Healthcare System was the closest hospital system that had the capacity to take the patient. The fact that no other Texas facility within 700 miles could take the patient exposes the severity of the crisis throughout the state.

Sections of South Texas, particularly the Coastal Bend and the Rio Grande Valley, have seen infections spread so quickly that local hospitals have been pushed to the limit. Four counties near the southernmost tip of the state have a total of just 21 ICU beds available for a population of approximately 1.4 million people. Ambulance drivers have reported wait times of up to 10 hours to deliver patients to overwhelmed emergency rooms. Some hospitals have begun turning away patients with a predicted low survival rate.

Areas that were relatively unaffected in the first few months of the pandemic are slowly moving towards crisis. Experts say they are seeing increases in community spread in urban and rural areas, leading to dozens of hot spots that will be difficult to contain.

The northeastern region of Mexico houses one of the main concentrations of maquiladoras— sweatshops run by transnational corporations—in the country. The region is a hotspot for infections and deaths in Mexico as thousands of workers are forced to work in unsafe conditions for the sake of profit.

The full impact of the storm on the region's COVID-19 outbreaks has yet to be seen. However, the natural disaster reveals the impotency of the ruling elites in the United States and Mexico which have been proven entirely unwilling to take the necessary measures to suppress the spread of the coronavirus. In combination with the devastation wrought by a natural disaster, the pandemic will continue to ravage the population under the malign neglect of the bourgeoisie.



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