

Texas revises its coronavirus death tally upward by 12 percent

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The Texas Department of State Health Services has revised the state's coronavirus death toll upward by more than 600 after state health officials yesterday began including deaths marked on death certificates as caused by COVID-19. The state has now suffered more than 5,200 known deaths, and currently hosts the highest number of daily deaths in the country, at 156. It also yesterday became the fourth state to exceed 400,000 confirmed cases.

If a similar revision needs to be made to the fatality rate across the US, more than 18,000 new deaths would have to be added to the national toll.

The change in reporting for deaths caused by the coronavirus pandemic in Texas highlights the haphazard nature of data reporting in the United States. Instead of a national database and dashboard to collect and display the extent of and death inflicted by the pandemic, states have been forced to scramble to report their own, often incomplete data. Missing data often includes testing and contact tracing information, as well as the time coronavirus tests take to complete.

Moreover, because the average time it takes for states to conduct the tests is often a week or more, much of the reported data is showing the state of the pandemic the previous week. Even though the US has conducted more than 55 million tests, the lag means that those who eventually test positive may have unknowingly spread the disease for days.

This state of affairs is one of the reasons the coronavirus has spread so widely across the country. As the World Health Organization has noted again and again, "the basic measures [that are] needed to suppress transmission and save lives: find, isolate, test and care for cases; and trace and quarantine their contacts." Such measures are essentially impossible to coordinate at the national scale when the data on the disease is so disparate and uncurated.

There are now 18 states in the United States that now record a 7-day average of more than 1,000 new cases of coronavirus each day. Six states—Louisiana, Tennessee, Georgia, Texas, California, Florida—currently record more than 2,000 new cases each day. There are 12 states with more than 100,000 cases, with Tennessee set to be the 13th in the next two days, and 26 states that have more than 1,000 confirmed deaths. Collectively in the country, there are now 4.4 million known cases, along with more than 150,000 deaths.

Worldwide, there are now 16.6 million cases and 656,000 deaths, concentrated largely in the US, Brazil (2.4 million cases, 88,000 deaths) and India (nearly 1.5 million cases, 33,000 deaths). Twenty-four countries now report more than 100,000 cases, and 44 have more than 1,000 known deaths. Every day, there are on average more than a quarter million new cases globally, and more than 5,000 lost human lives.

The epicenter of the pandemic continues to be in Florida, which has recorded at least 433,000 cases, and has the most new cases each day, 10,500, of any state. It will likely surpass the case count in New York tomorrow. California stands alongside Florida and Texas as another hot spot in the country and currently has the most recorded COVID-19 cases overall, at 467,000. Other emerging outbreaks include those in Georgia, Tennessee and Louisiana, which all currently record at least 2,000 new cases each day.

One of the cases in Florida is Desmond Silva, a 22-year-old nurse who contracted the virus several months ago, seemingly recovered, and is now paralyzed from the neck down from suspected long-term coronavirus complications. One of the deaths is Kimora Lynum, a 9-year-old, who died of the virus with no known underlying health issues. She is the youngest to die in the state so far. CNN reports a 34 percent increase in child cases and 23 percent increase in hospitalizations during

the past week.

At the same time, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis is moving ahead with his plan to reopen the state's schools, some of which will be open in two weeks. DeSantis agrees with the position of US Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos that children are "stoppers of the disease" who "don't get it and transmit it themselves," despite recent research showing that young people between ages 10 and 19 spread the contagion just as much as adults.

When discussing the surging case and death count in Florida with ABC News on Sunday, White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows admitted "we're not going to have a solution" to safely reopen schools.

The reopening of professional baseball has also been threatened. ESPN has reported that the Miami Marlins recently announced that 12 players and two coaches contracted the virus and the team has thus canceled its home opener against the Baltimore Orioles. The home game of the Philadelphia Phillies against the New York Yankees was called off for coronavirus-related reasons. The canceled games account for about a tenth of the scheduled games for the reduced season.

In a similar vein, St. Louis has announced several new restrictions limiting the size of gatherings and sharply reducing business occupancy as a result of sharply rising case numbers in the city. It currently has more than 11,500 known cases and at least 636 deaths caused by COVID-19, making up more than a quarter of Missouri's cases and at least half the state's deaths.

It has also been observed that the number of new coronavirus cases at the national level are likely incomplete. Since hospitals were ordered to report case data directly to the Department of Health and Human Services, instead of to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which is standard for any outbreak, the number of new cases in the country has leveled off at an average of about 67,500 cases per day after growing steadily since the second week of June. It is unclear if there is a genuine leveling off in the number of new cases, or active agency by the Trump administration to conceal the full spread of the pandemic.



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