Missouri among top five US states with COVID-19 infections

Cole Michaels
18 September 2020

The coronavirus is spreading from urban to rural areas of Missouri, with over 109,000 recorded infections and 1,838 deaths in the state as of this writing. All 114 counties and the independent city of St. Louis have recorded coronavirus infections, with the number of confirmed cases rising sharply since Missouri reopened in mid-June.

Three of the four days seeing the highest number of hospitalizations have occurred over the past week, according to the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch.* More than 1,020 were in hospitals with confirmed or presumed COVID-19 infections last Saturday, the second-highest day on record.

A recent White House Red Zone report indicates more than 60 percent of Missouri counties have moderate or high levels of community transmission with the remaining counties all having high levels of community transmission last week, according to the report. The report also recommended Missouri bars close.

This week, visitors began to arrive at Lake of the Ozarks for an annual motorcycle event, BikeFest, which local media report could see 100,000 participants. For the Sturgis bike event earlier this year, experts put a 90 percent chance that event created 100,000 new COVID-19 infections, making it a "superspreader event."

Columbia and Jefferson City were both included on the report's list of Missouri cities in the "red zone." The report said both Mid-Missouri cities confirmed 100 or more new coronavirus cases per 100,000 residents and the positivity rate was higher than 10 percent.

Infectious disease expert Dr. Anthony Fauci warned residents of Missouri and six other states to be on guard for a surge in cases after the Labor Day holiday weekend. During an interview with Bloomberg, Dr. Fauci said, "There are several states that are at risk for surging, namely North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Arkansas, Missouri, Indiana, Illinois. Those states are starting to see an increase in the percent positive of their testing; that is generally predictive that there's going to be a problem."

The rise of cases has been blamed on people not following mask-wearing and social distancing guidelines, especially young people. While there are individuals who choose to forego distancing recommendations, blame for the rise of cases and deaths in Missouri lies mainly with state and county governments. Mandated lockdowns imposed in March were lifted in a bid to get profits pumping to the ruling elite by forcing people back to work. Many counties, especially ones in rural areas, are resuming in-person instruction in schools.

Rural counties of southeastern Missouri, bordering Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky and Tennessee, remain the state's hotspots. According to a *New York Times* graph of coronavirus spread in Missouri, McDonald County has 1 out of every 22 residents infected with the virus. Cole County set a record for new cases September 4, and Howard County recorded its first coronavirus-related death the same day.

As of September 16, Howell County, with a population of 40,000 people, has 438 confirmed cases, a rate that has been on the rise for weeks. The West Plains R-VII School District had gone for in-person instruction until a countywide increase in cases forced the district to adopt a hybrid model for grades 7–12. Quote from the district website: "COVID-19 exposure levels and positive cases continue to rise in Howell County and in our community. The district is experiencing an increase in student absences as well as students and staff on quarantine. As a result of the

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feedback from our community and staff, we are changing to a hybrid learning model for grades 7–12.

The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services has been unable to accurately record state death totals. Eighty-nine previously unaccounted for deaths were added last week to the tally after the DHSS blamed technical difficulties for the oversight. In a September 5 tweet, the DHSS explained, “Through continuing efforts to ensure data transparency and quality, DHSS analysts discovered an inconsistency in death certificate diagnosis codes when compared to case information contained in DHSS disease surveillance systems. After thorough analysis and evaluation, these additional COVID-19-associated deaths were identified.”

The major metropolitan areas of the state are seeing increasing rates of infection. The Kansas City metropolitan area has over 33,000 confirmed infections. Jefferson County, a rural portion of the St. Louis metro area, has been declared a “red zone” in terms of increased COVID-19 diagnoses. St. Louis County has over 20,000 cases, while Boone County, which encompasses the city of Columbia, has more than 3,500 cases. Greene and Christian counties which form the metro area of Springfield have nearly 5,000 cases.

In August, a student at Fort Zumwalt South High School in the city of O’Fallon posted an image on social media of crowded staircases in the school building.

Neighboring Illinois, whose southwestern counties are part of the St. Louis, Missouri metropolitan area, is seeing a surge in cases with current totals at over 240,000 and more than 8,100 deaths. As with Missouri, all counties have recorded cases.

With schools reopening in districts across the state, it is inevitable that students will have to deal with the trauma of losing teachers, parents and fellow students. On September 6, 34-year-old Ashlee DeMarinis, 34, special education teacher at John Evans Middle School in Potosi (Washington County), died after three-week battle with coronavirus.

The pandemic is also being used as an opportunity for the state government to slash social spending. Missouri Governor Mike Parson cut nearly $450 million from the state budget in June, mostly from K-12 schools, colleges and universities. While cutting funds from education, Parson inked a no-bid contract with the McChrystal Group that has paid out over $829,000 in federal coronavirus relief funds to the consulting firm, reportedly to help coordinate Missouri’s pandemic response.

The fight to save thousands of lives requires a conscious struggle by the working class against capitalism and for socialism. The first step is to form rank-and-file committees in workplaces nationwide to coordinate a national general strike. The WSWS will do all it can to assist the forming of such local committees.

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