Coronavirus surges across US Midwest

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Wisconsin is emerging as one of the major hotspots for the coronavirus pandemic in the United States, with an average now of more than 2,000 new cases each day. This is more than double the rate of new cases during the first week of August and a sharp increase after the drop in new cases seen throughout that month.

Similar increased trends have occurred in other states in the region. North and South Dakota collectively have more than 800 new cases each day, almost four times the daily case rate two months ago. Cases in Missouri spiked after its reopening in June and July, going from less than 200 cases a day to now more than 1,500 and the number of new cases in Illinois is now above 2,000 per day for the first time since late May.

Nationally, there are on average more than 40,000 reported coronavirus cases each day, a value which was declining after its peak in July and now seems to have stabilized, adding to the nearly 7.4 million total infections the United States has so far suffered. And while daily deaths continue to decline, at least 750 die each day from the pandemic, a tally that now exceeds 210,000 lives lost.

The pandemic is also moving away from major urban areas into smaller cities and towns. In Wisconsin, some of the most impacted areas are Green Bay and Fox Valley, where hospitals are nearing capacity. Moreover, as the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* reports, new cases are not just being mostly reported among college-aged students as a consequence of reopening in-person instruction at universities across the country.

The spread at universities and the surrounding communities is especially damning in light of documents recently obtained by the *New York Times* which show that Deborah Birx, the White House coronavirus response coordinator, and Marc Short, Vice President Mike Pence's chief of staff, told the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to downplay the threat of the coronavirus to young people.

In particular, White House staff repeatedly asked the CDC for reports cherry-picking data to show that cases among young people were going down. They also asked for "snazzy, easy-to-read" material showing that children and teenagers have the lowest COVID-19 mortality rates. No consideration was given to the numerous accounts of severe illness among children or their ability to spread the pandemic to others, much less the actual mortality rate itself.

The *Times* also reported that, just before the CDC issued guidance regarding school reopenings on July 23, numerous White House officials edited the document to include information the agency explicitly objected to in order to suggest that the coronavirus was less deadly to children than the seasonal flu.

Now, middle-aged adults are dealing with the brunt of new infections, which was predicted by health experts who warned against campus reopenings during the summer. As colleges brought students back, the pandemic spread among them. As those students interact with the broader community, the pandemic spreads even further. It should be noted that while the percentage of young people reporting new infections has gone down in places like Green Bay and Fox Valley, this is largely because the number of new cases in this age group is staying constant, while the number of cases in older groups is going up.

Wisconsin also continues to report new deaths, the total of which now stands at 1,283.

The number of people testing positive is also increasing across the Midwest. In seven states—Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, South Dakota and Wisconsin—at least 10 percent of those who get tested for the coronavirus test positive. In Wisconsin, the positivity rate is 18.7 percent, according to the website CovidExitStrategy.org; in Iowa, the positivity rate is 25.3 percent. In all of the aforementioned states, the positivity rate is increasing even as testing is also

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increasing, indicating that the pandemic is fully entrenched in these areas and spreading fast.

The surge in cases where there are school and university openings is a national phenomenon. In New York City, where cases were suppressed after being the world epicenter of the pandemic in April, the daily positivity rate has now reached 3.25 percent for the first time since June, according to the *Wall Street Journal*. This is after a week of initial school reopenings and just as limited indoor dining is beginning.

Reopenings elsewhere are continuing apace. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis ordered all restaurants in the state fully open and has threatened municipalities that attempt to make their own restrictions on businesses. DeSantis has been justifying his state's reopening by noting that the number of new cases is relatively stable. Such arguments hide the reality that there are currently more than 2,000 new cases each day in the state, and that this is more than twice the new case rate before Florida's large spike in new cases in June and July.

Texas has followed an only slight less aggressive plan. With still more than 3,000 new cases each day, Governor Greg Abbott recently announced that most of the state's restaurants, retail outlets and office buildings will be able to operate at 75 percent of normal capacity. This is, as in Florida, less restrictive than during the initial stages of the pandemic in March, while the state faces nearly four times as many daily new cases. Similar processes are happening in California, setting the stage for a resurgence of cases across the country.

The coronavirus also continues to spread in various Native American communities. A two-week stay-at-home order was issued yesterday to the Blackfeet Reservation outside of Great Falls, Montana, after a spike in cases over the past two weeks has brought the total number of active cases on the reservation to 150. A variety of $500 fines have been imposed on anyone who violates the order or any of the social distancing guidelines set in place.

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