

Health systems in the United States are facing growing strains with the surge in COVID-19 cases

Benjamin Mateus
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With the winter flu season looming in the northern hemisphere, the global COVID pandemic health crisis is expanding ever faster, exacerbating the political and economic crisis of world capitalism. As profit-driven health care systems prove incapable of meeting the acute human needs generated by the public health catastrophe, there is mounting pressure on the political structures of capitalist rule.

France and Germany have announced partial nationwide lockdowns in response to an exponential growth in cases. And as in Europe, health systems in many US states have reached critical capacity, as the number of cases across the country continues to skyrocket, surpassing their previous highs in the spring and summer.

The number of US COVID-19 cases surpassed nine million yesterday, with 500,000 of these cases added to the ledger just in the last week. In an indication of the acceleration in the crisis, the seven-day moving average of new daily cases has climbed from a low of 43,106 on October 1 to 75,072 on October 28, a 75 percent rise in only a month. At the same time, the positivity rate in testing has climbed from 4.3 percent to 7.3 percent.

The death rate began to see its initial uptick on October 17. This is a 16-day lag from the initial rise in cases in this third wave in the US, after remaining in a range of 700 deaths per day for several weeks. The rate has now reached 842 per day, with more than 1,000 deaths on Wednesday. However, as health systems begin to reach capacity, to the point where urgent and early interventions become impossible to administer and emergency rooms are again flooded with patients, experience has shown that more will die.

In an impassioned press brief on Monday, the director-

general of the World Health Organization, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, called for world leaders to heed the dangers associated with this tremendous new surge of cases.

“Last week saw the highest number of COVID-19 cases reported so far. Many countries in the northern hemisphere are seeing concern rise in cases and hospitalizations, and ICUs are filling up to capacity in some places, particularly in Europe and North America.

“The fatigue is real, but we cannot give up. We must not give up. Leaders must balance the disruption to lives and livelihoods with the need to protect health workers and health systems as intensive care fills up. Many of those health care workers who have themselves gone through immense stress and trauma are still on the frontlines facing a fresh wave of new patients. We must do all we can to protect health workers.”

The hospitals’ strain is real, despite President Trump’s incessant claims that “fake news” media conspiracies and too much testing are responsible for the rise being reported across the country. Twenty-nine states have posted record highs as hospitals across the heartland are flooded with new patients. According to the COVID-19 Tracking Project metrics, there are presently 44,212 patients hospitalized in the US for COVID-19, a 46 percent spike since the lows in mid-September. Of these, 8,909 are in intensive care units and 2,287 are on ventilators.

The twin cities of El Paso, Texas and Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, which comprise a tightly knit metropolitan area home to three million people, are confronting record surges in cases that are hindering health delivery, reaching 100 percent capacity Sunday. On

Monday, El Paso County saw a record number of 1,443 cases. Over 850 people are hospitalized, with 180 in the ICUs and 99 on ventilators. A curfew was imposed on Sunday evening from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. The civic center is being converted into an overflow site for patients. Presently, 41 percent of all hospitalizations are due to COVID.

At the opposite side of the country, in Wisconsin, according to the state health department, hospital bed capacity reached 82 percent on Sunday. Twenty-five percent of the 1,385 COVID-19 patients are in ICUs. Yesterday, the state reported 3,815 new cases and 45 deaths. The outbreak in the state, which started surging two months ago, is among the worst in the nation, lagging behind only the much more populous states of Texas, Illinois and California in terms of the average number of new daily cases. The positivity rate has reached 27 percent.

Ryan Westergaard, Department of Health Services chief medical officer, noted at a local press briefing, “It’s a nightmare scenario, frankly, that this could get quite a bit worse in the next several weeks or months before it gets better.” Dr. Gregory Poland, director of the vaccine research group at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, described it as “a disaster in warp speed.”

The daily case rate across the state of Utah has tripled in one month, currently with 1,500-plus cases a day. There are currently 309 patients in hospitals with COVID-19, with 111 in ICUs. The University of Utah Health hospital in Salt Lake City reported having reached 104 percent of capacity. Additional ICU beds have been set up to accommodate the rising tide in cases. The hospital is a critical resource for “Utahns and residents of five surrounding states in a referral area encompassing more than 10 percent of the continental United States,” according to its website.

The President of the Utah Hospital Association, Greg Bell, warned that if trends continue hospitals may reach the limits of their contingency plans for ICUs and need to consider resorting to “crisis standards of care guidelines,” which allow hospitals to assess who would be denied care.

Cases across North Dakota continue to climb, stressing the state’s hospital capacity, with only 14 percent of 1,851 total staffed beds available for new patients. As of Monday, there are 173 COVID-19

patients admitted, with 29 in the ICU. In South Dakota, there have been 1,270 new infections, with 412 hospitalizations.

Tulsa’s largest hospital system, Saint Francis, sees a growing number of patients with critical care needs. CEO Jake Henry said, “Hospitalizations have spiked... deaths from COVID-19 continue, and the rural areas have begun to surge.” Saint Francis is dealing with severe staff shortages and anticipating more cases compounded by the flu season. The hospital took out an ad to plead with the community to turn the tide.

According to the *Washington Post*, Ohio set a new high on Monday for hospitalizations, joining seven other states—Iowa, Kentucky, Minnesota, New Mexico, South Dakota, West Virginia and Wisconsin—that have set records. Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, critical states for President Trump’s reelection bid, are all states where cases and hospitalizations have risen sharply.

Despite the flood of cases and the accompanying misery that seems to have no end in sight, Trump has unabashedly claimed that one of his significant accomplishments had been the “ending the COVID-19 pandemic.” The statement was released as a White House Office of Science and Technology Policy news release. Additionally, Trump told an audience at a Wisconsin campaign rally that case numbers are high because physicians are incentivized to falsely attribute deaths to COVID-19, to gain increased reimbursements.

Such brazen and provocative lies demonstrate that the ruling elite as a whole have no intention of controlling the pandemic or alleviating the conditions facing working people, who bear the brunt of this health emergency.



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