

Cases in El Paso, Texas spike as coronavirus hospitalizations surge nationwide

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On Wednesday, El Paso, Texas reported a record 3,100 new coronavirus cases, shattering the previous day's count of 1,281. The spike in new cases came only seven days after County Judge Ricardo Samaniego, the county's highest elected official, ordered the county back into lockdown for two weeks.

The lockdown was put in place, closing restaurants and salons but not government buildings or schools, after it became clear that the surge in new cases in the region would overwhelm hospitals.

These fears have been realized. There are currently 1,041 people who are hospitalized, including 311 in intensive care units. The number of active cases currently stands at 21,902, about 2.6 percent of the county's population, while 33,543 people have recovered from the disease. At least 617 people have died in the county from COVID-19 since March, including eight new deaths today.

The number of patients in intensive care is particularly alarming, because the county has only 285 licensed ICU beds, of which only 234 are currently staffed. The county is being supplemented by state and federal medical teams that have set up makeshift hospitals in tents and a nearby convention center.

Patients are also being airlifted to other cities to be treated. Such support, however, may not be sustainable as cases continue to rise in other parts of Texas and across the country. This in turn sharply raises the danger that hospitals in the county, which act as the medical hub for all of West Texas and Southwestern New Mexico, will not be able to properly care for all patients, forcing doctors to make the choice of deciding who lives and who dies.

Cases are also rising across the Mexican border in Ciudad Juarez, which reported 542 new cases and 27 new deaths on Tuesday. Both El Paso and Ciudad

Juarez lie on the Rio Grande River and form the El Paso-Juarez metropolitan area, which encompasses more than 2.7 million people. It is the second largest such binational region on the US-Mexico border (after San Diego-Tijuana). In total, the region has suffered 82,295 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 2,673 deaths.

The dangers that the pandemic is posing to the residents of El Paso and Ciudad Juarez did not, however, prevent the state of Texas from suing El Paso County for issuing the lockdown order. Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton filed a motion Tuesday for a temporary injunction against the lockdown measure, claiming that "Judge Samaniego has no authority to flout Governor Abbott's executive orders by shutting down businesses in El Paso County." Paxton's statement also called the action "unlawful" and said it was "oppressing" those who live in the county.

Paxton was joined by several owners who are also suing El Paso County to keep their restaurants open amid the raging pandemic. These include Pizza Properties, M&S International Group, Wing Daddy's, Run Bull Run, Charcoaler, Triple A Restaurants, CC Restaurant Management, FD Montana, WT Chophouse, Verlander Enterprises and Bakery Ventures I. Collectively, they have already received between \$10 million and \$24 million in coronavirus aid and are well positioned to pay the wages of their workers and meet basic day-to-day expenses even without two weeks of customer revenue.

That Paxton's actions have any traction, and by extension those of the Texas governor and President Donald Trump, speaks to the complicity of the Democratic Party. While thousands in El Paso and millions in Texas and nationally are struggling to feed their families amidst the pandemic, the ostensible

opposition party defends the massive bailout of Wall Street for which it voted and opposes the marshaling of resources needed to implement necessary public health measures and provide social support for the unemployed.

The sharp rise in confirmed coronavirus cases in El Paso is a reflection of the spread of the pandemic nationwide. There have been more than 9.7 million cases reported in the United States, and there are currently a record 3.2 million active cases, a number that has been steadily growing over the past two-and-a-half weeks. Daily new cases are on the rise in all but three states. There are nearly 240,000 reported deaths caused by COVID-19 nationally, and daily deaths are rising, averaging more than 850 human lives lost each day, and climbing.

Hospitalizations are also increasing, particularly in Indiana, Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota and Oklahoma, which have all reported record high hospitalizations this week. The number of COVID hospitalizations in Nebraska is at 642, three times higher than the state's June peak, forcing it to limit elective surgeries to make space for current and projected COVID patients.

The medical system in Iowa faces similar circumstances. There are 777 hospitalized patients in the state, of which 182 require intensive care. This includes 164 new patients admitted in the last 24 hours, a jump from 92 the previous day and a trend that has been increasing significantly since the beginning of October.

There is also a renewed shortage of critical medical supplies, including N95 face masks used to protect health care workers from the virus as they treat patients. While hospitals and states were able to build up some supply after the initial extreme shortages seen in March and April, such stockpiles are being taxed as hospitals across the country again begin to overflow. Moreover, many facilities had not stopped practices such as cleaning or reusing masks, which further heightens risks for patients as well as the doctors and nurses who treat them.



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