

Hospitalization crisis across the US as coronavirus infections surge

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Using 10 modeling groups' data, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) updated its four-week hospitalization forecast for Nov. 30. They estimated that there would be 2,600 to 13,000 new COVID-19 hospitalizations per day by the end of this month. Over the last seven days, the national rate of admissions to hospitals has been just over 1,200 per day. In other words, the CDC is expecting the rate to climb two to 10 times in the next three to four weeks.

This is an astounding rate that should force local and state governments to pause and give immediate considerations to their response to the pandemic. This is no longer a speculative matter. The need for greater mitigation efforts is becoming necessary to stem the tide of infections to provide relief to health care systems.

Even the mainstream news and local media outlets have been raising repeated concerns over the alarming rates of hospitalizations from COVID-19 infections that are bringing health systems to the brink. Unlike testing and case numbers, which can be quite variable, hospitalization numbers are a reliable metric for the state of the community transmission as it represents people sick enough to seek care.

Europe's health system, which is in a dire predicament, faces significant challenges and should provide the US with a terrifying perspective. Germany, which has twice the per capita ICU capacity on average compared to Europe as a whole, has reached 75 percent of its total capacity. Belgium is currently transferring patients to Germany as their ICU capacity has filled.

Dr. Susanne Johna of Saint Josef's Hospital, an internist in Germany, speaking to DW News TV, said peak ICU capacity is usually reached two weeks after the peak in infections. Responding as to when she expected the peak to arrive, she answered, "nobody

knows." Due to significant staff shortages, nurses and physicians in Belgium and the Netherlands are being asked to keep working. The country's health minister, Frank Vandenbroucke, described the situation as a "tsunami of infections where the authorities are no longer in control."

There are currently 55,817 hospitalized patients in the United States, up from a low of 28,608 on Sept. 20. Of these, 11,078 are in the ICUs and 2,943 are on ventilators. The previous peaks in hospitalization in April and July reached close to 60,000. The breakdown by age group (which has remained consistent throughout the pandemic) reveals that 75 percent are over age 50, with the majority in this group being over 65. Those between 18 and 49 account for 24 percent of hospitalizations.

Dr. Deborah Birx, the White House coronavirus taskforce coordinator, sent an election-eve memo to President Trump warning that "we are entering the most concerning and most deadly phase of this pandemic ... leading to increased mortality." Dr. Anthony Fauci, blatantly opposing Trump, told the *Washington Post*, "We're in a world of hurt." These assessments are quickly being realized.

El Paso, Texas, which has been the center of the state's hospitalization crisis, saw a record of 1,064 people hospitalized with the virus on Saturday, 315 in ICUs and 169 on ventilators. Over 660 people have died from COVID-19 in the metropolitan area. There are currently 24,562 active cases, with 10,000 cases reported in just one week. The weekly death toll has climbed back to its summer peaks.

El Paso County Judge Ricardo Samaniego's shutting down of non-essential businesses issued on Oct. 29 was allowed to stand by District Court Judge William Moody for lack of precedent for or against the

shutdown. Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton had argued Judge Samaniego's order was unconstitutional, infringing on the rights of private businesses. Meanwhile, non-COVID patients are being airlifted to other cities to free space in local hospitals as a fourth mobile morgue has been brought in and health workers are being deployed to El Paso. Apparently, the restrictions are beginning to turn the curve of new cases.

Though the surge is evident throughout the US, the Midwest has been particularly ravaged during this phase of the pandemic. In Minnesota, where cases have been rising exponentially and positivity rates have climbed over 12 percent, the hospital systems reported that they were treating more than 1,000 patients each day with COVID-19, their highest volume so far in the pandemic. Despite the adjustments hospitals are making, Dr. Mark Sannes, an infectious disease doctor at the Bloomington-based HealthPartners, admitted, "This is the most concerned, I think, we have been in regards to the capacity of the system to be able to handle what's coming." Additionally, health care workers are falling ill or self-quarantining from possible exposures.

The state of Illinois has seen cases rocketing over the last two weeks, reaching a peak of nearly 12,500 new cases on Saturday. Governor J.B. Pritzker, speaking to reporters on Thursday, provided a disturbing assessment, saying, "We are going to experience a surge in hospitalizations much higher than where we are now. And in some areas of our state, that will mean that you'll run out of hospital beds, and nurses and doctors who can treat you."

With over 4,000 "daily bed usage," the state is poised to surpass its April peak next week. Illinois has caught up with neighboring states, and the contagion is returning into more populated regions of the greater Chicago area. In Will and Kankakee counties, hospitalization rates have tripled. Amita Health Saint Joseph in Joliet, where nurses were on the picket lines striking for safer conditions several months ago, have seen numbers return to their previous highs.

With over 900 confirmed patients in Colorado Friday, Governor Jared Polis said that hospitalizations in the state are the highest they have ever been. Dr. Eric France, Colorado's chief medical officer at the health department, said, "As I think about this pandemic and

these eight months I've been working on it, I'd say I'm most worried today."

Wisconsin saw a record 7,000 new cases Saturday as Chief Health Officer Stephanie Smiley tendered her resignation. The positivity rate now exceeds 15 percent. With a record of 3,931 cases on Friday, Missouri has 1,925 people in hospitals throughout the state. The Kansas City region may reach capacity in the next few weeks.

More than 40 states are reporting a rise in COVID-19 cases as colder weather has driven many people indoors again. Burnout and fatigue are being expressed by physicians and nurses who dare to speak to the media. Health officials fear that Thanksgiving and then the Christmas holidays will only pour gasoline atop a raging fire.

States across the nation are resisting lockdowns and strong mitigation measures that could quickly stem the coronavirus while feigning concern and blaming the population for failing to follow safe practices. Democratic Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot's remarks encapsulated these sentiments when she said, "If we need to take further steps and move back into phase three or even going back to shelter in place, I'm not going to hesitate to do that. I hope that won't be necessary, but it is all in your hands."

With Illinois ranking number one among states with the most new cases of COVID in the past seven days, one must ask how much worse it needs to get? Despite the limited restrictions already imposed across the state, Governor Pritzker has offered mild rebukes of county and city leaders for not enforcing them.

As a trigger event, the pandemic has exposed the political establishment's allegiance to finance capital regardless of the health catastrophe that is running roughshod over the population. The push to reopen schools and workplaces during the pandemic, by not only Trump but also Democratic governors as well, is a reflection of a political system that supports the financial oligarchy at every turn. The election of Biden will do nothing to change this situation.



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