

US coronavirus hospitalizations hit new peak

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The number of hospitalizations from the coronavirus pandemic in the United States reached 61,964 as of Tuesday evening, according to the COVID Tracking Project. Also on Monday, the seven-day average of daily deaths in the US surpassed 1,000 for the first time since August 22. Both statistics demonstrate that the coronavirus is rampaging uncontrolled across the country, while the US ruling elite continues to send workers back to infected factories, offices and schools.

The current hospitalization rate is now higher than the previous all-time high recorded in April, while the number of known new cases is more than three times what it was seven months ago. The number of coronavirus tests returning a positive result has also risen to 7.7 percent, up from 4.0 percent at the start of October, indicating that current testing measures are not fully capturing the true extent of the pandemic.

Still higher numbers loom. In contrast to April, there are not even token measures in place to contain the pandemic, such as the national lockdown that covered most of that month. The policy is instead one of herd immunity, that is, the unchecked spread of the pandemic through the entire population.

This was spelled out explicitly by White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows in an interview on CNN last month, when he admitted, "We're not going to control the pandemic."

Overall, there have been more than 10.5 million confirmed coronavirus cases in the United States, including 3.6 million that are currently active. Of those who became infected, more than 245,000 have died.

One of the most severe outbreaks in the country continues in El Paso, Texas. According to the city's coronavirus dashboard, 1,292 new cases were reported Tuesday, and nine new deaths. There are currently 27,895 active cases in the county, more than eight times the number of active cases a month ago.

The number of people currently hospitalized with

COVID-19 in the county is 1,076, with 319 patients under intensive care. Dozens have been airlifted to other places in Texas and New Mexico, as the hospitals in El Paso itself are at capacity and emergency field hospitals that have been set up are already strained.

Across the US-Mexico border in Ciudad Juarez, a new mobile hospital that can house 20 COVID-19 patients has been opened to handle the surge in the city. Ciudad Juarez has faced a similar situation to that in El Paso, where a sharp increase in cases in the multinational metropolitan area has forced Mexico's federal government to send additional aid to the city and the state of Chihuahua as a whole. Ciudad Juarez has suffered 16,641 coronavirus cases since the pandemic began, and 1,525 deaths.

To handle the surge in the past month, El Paso County Judge Ricardo Samaniego ordered restaurants, bars and salons to close, in a two-week lockdown of the county. It is slated to end Wednesday night, although it may be extended. One factor is the sharp rise in deaths in the past month. Six refrigerated temporary morgues are already full and 10 more are en route. Samaniego has requested that a further four be provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), to be sent to local funeral homes as needed.

These procedures, however, are not sustainable indefinitely, as hospitalizations continue to rise elsewhere across the country. The number of field hospitals, available beds, intensive care units and ventilators available to treat coronavirus patients, or patients with any other ailment, are rapidly shrinking. Transferring patients is all the more difficult in the United States, where Medicaid and insurance vary from state to state, meaning that even if beds are available, a given patient still might not be able to move and receive treatment because of the retrograde state of health care in the country.

In one particularly harrowing account, Dr. Emily

Porter, a physician in Texas, shared a Twitter appeal for COVID beds from a Texas doctor. The appeal, to the Emergency Physician Forum group on Facebook, reads: “Does anyone who works in Texas have open covid beds at your hospitals accepting transfers? Getting desperate here in my little town in panhandle. No beds at our hospital and anywhere within 200 miles isn’t accepting. I’ve been calling dozens of hospitals for my 5 patients in my 8 bed ER who need to be transferred out.”

As Dr. Porter noted, “emergency physicians are literally crowdsourcing COVID beds on social media while hospital administrators are home sleeping.”

Similar new lockdown measures are being prepared in California. The number of hospitalizations has increased in the state by 32 percent over the past two weeks, according to Dr. Mark Ghaly, the state’s secretary of health and human services. As a result, San Diego, Sacramento and Stanislaus counties—home to 5.5 million people—are going to re-enter the most restrictive phase of their lockdowns starting this week.

Ghaly warned that “if things stay the way they are...over half of California counties will have moved into a more restrictive tier.” This will involve closing down in-person restaurant dining in much of the state, along with gyms and a variety of other nonessential indoor venues. California currently has more than 990,000 cases and 18,000 deaths, with an average of nearly 6,000 daily cases and more than 40 deaths.

Other states are taking similar large-scale measures. Utah Governor Gary Herbert has announced a universal mask mandate while in public for the entire state. There are at least 137,000 cases and 672 logged deaths in the state, with a rate of new cases four times what it was at its peak in late July.

The state has 453 patients hospitalized with confirmed or suspected cases of COVID-19, including 185 patients in ICU beds. At present, Utah has only just enough staffed ICU beds to cope with current cases, and hospitalizations are trending upwards. North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming are similarly overwhelmed.

Workers should not, however, lower their guard because of various actions taken by states. The measures that have been taken are inadequate.

As shown in the case of El Paso, lockdowns take more than two weeks to slow the rate of new cases and

hospitalizations. Moreover, none of the new lockdown measures so far are aimed at closing schools or workplaces, which have become the two main vectors of transmission.

What is needed is not a piecemeal closing and reopening carried out county by county and state by state, but a nationally and internationally coordinated effort, including the closure of all workplaces, except those required to produce the personal protection equipment, food and other social necessities, and other resources essential for containing and ending the pandemic, with no loss in income for the workers affected. The focus must be on saving lives rather than protecting the profits of corporations and hedge funds.



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