

US facing a deluge of COVID-19 hospitalizations as Delta variant spreads rapidly

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The US added 235,099 cases of COVID-19 to its growing tally of cases Monday, according to the *New York Times* COVID tracker. It was the highest number of new infections recorded on a single day since mid-January. However, this shocking number is clearly inaccurate, as many states have scaled back their reporting on cases and deaths, thus making sense of the sudden jump in infections challenging and troubling.

As Dr. Jorge Caballero, who has called sending unvaccinated children and teachers back into schools “immoral,” recently tweeted, many states are dumping the backlog of weekend numbers, making tracking daily statistics impossible. Weekly trends now must stand in to provide a semblance of a picture, but in the context of a highly transmissible virus, they cannot aid in tracking and tracing infections. Nonetheless, the seven-day moving average continues to climb, having reached 117,000 new infections each day. The last time the US saw such a rate was in the first week in February, just over six months ago.

Florida, which is facing a rapidly worsening health care crisis, only releases weekly reports, making it impossible to determine where infections are occurring and how they are spreading. Adding to the confusion, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) arbitrarily divided the 56,633 cases reported by Florida over the weekend, recording 28,316 new COVID cases on Saturday and 28,317 new cases Sunday. Rather than demanding timely and accurate data, such casual data manipulation only confirms it has abdicated its leadership.

Still, what remains certain is that the positivity rate for the state is now close to 20 percent, as the state has broken hospitalization records for COVID-19 for nine consecutive days. As of last week, close to 14,000 people were hospitalized in Florida, with 2,835 in intensive care, representing 45 percent of the state’s ICU capacity. On Sunday, COVID-19 patients accounted for 25 percent of all hospital patients.

Of the *New York Times* August reported, that 2021 despite in cases, seven states—Florida, South Dakota, Iowa, Alaska, Maine, Michigan and Oklahoma—have reduced the frequency of reporting their COVID-19 statistics, while Nebraska stopped updating its COVID dashboard on June 30, around the time Governor Pete Ricketts ended a state of emergency. Dr. Bob Rauner, chief medical officer of OneHealth Nebraska, plainly told the *Lincoln Journal Star*, “It’s a bad idea to not report data so others can’t analyze it.”

Presently, there are almost 69,000 COVID-19 patients hospitalized in the US, an increase of 2,591 from the week before. Of these, 16,828 are in ICUs. Every state except Utah has seen a rise in new cases. The daily average of COVID-19 deaths has risen by more than 100 percent over two weeks, standing at over 550 per day.

There is also a rising trend among fully vaccinated people hospitalized with severe breakthrough infections. These individuals are generally the elderly with comorbidities who live in long-term care facilities. It underscores the dangers of the new variants and the need to expose the dangerous idea that vaccination alone can navigate the world through the pandemic without the comprehensive social measures—masking, social distancing and the lockdown of non-essential businesses—that have proven to save lives.

With schools set to open, many pediatricians and health clinicians are warning of the dangers posed to children who remain unvaccinated. Just last week, new pediatric COVID-19 cases neared 94,000, with rising numbers of hospitalizations. This week saw a single-day high in pediatric admissions for COVID-19. Compared to last month, children are now being hospitalized at a rate almost four times higher.

The president of the American Academy of Pediatrics, Dr. Lee Savio Beers, is urging the Food and Drug Administration to authorize vaccines for those five years of age and older as soon as possible. “We need to be

approaching the trials and authorization of COVID vaccines for children with the same urgency we did for adults. Just as it can be a serious disease in adults, it can be a very serious disease in children,” she said. However, one COVID-19 vaccine manufacturer, Pfizer, will only apply for such authorization at the end of September, which would mean the commencement of vaccinations in December.

In the meantime, the COVID-19 Forecast Hub at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst has predicted that if the current surges are not immediately contained, new hospitalizations could quadruple by Labor Day to as high as 33,300 per day.

While states like Florida, Louisiana, Arkansas, Alabama, Missouri, Mississippi and Texas have the country’s highest case rates, 90 percent of counties nationwide, home to 98 percent of the US population, are reporting substantial or high community transmissions.

For example, Minnesota health officials reported that 333 people were hospitalized on Tuesday. Admissions have tripled over the past month, highlighting the broad spread of the Delta variant across the United States. Ninety-two people are in intensive care due to respiratory difficulties and medical complications associated with the infection. According to the *Star Tribune*, the positivity rate of COVID-19 tests has jumped from 1.1 percent in June to 4.9 percent now. These trends are alarming for a state that has exceeded the national average, with 54 percent of its population fully vaccinated.

The Minnesota Department of Public Health has confirmed that the new Delta variant may cause at least 85 percent of all new infections. The state, like many others, has attempted to use monetary incentives to increase the size of the vaccinated population. However, without strict public health measures to stop the spread and eliminate the coronavirus, even a robust vaccination status will not curb the spread of the variant.

Epidemiologist Larry Brilliant, part of the World Health Organization team that helped eradicate smallpox, offered *CNBC* a sobering assessment Monday. “I think we’re closer to the beginning than we are to the end [of the pandemic], and that’s not because the variant that we’re looking at right now is going to last that long,” Brilliant warned. “Unless we vaccinate everyone in 200 plus countries, there will still be new variants.” Currently, approximately 15 percent of the world’s population has been fully vaccinated.

Dr. Malgorzata Gasperowicz, a developmental biologist and researcher at the University of Calgary, tweeted on July 23, “we can’t vaccinate our way out of the pandemic. We need both vaccines and public health measures. It was barely possible with the original variant. [But] with the Delta variant both public health and vaccines become less

effective. But combined, they *may* still work.” [Emphasis added]

Looking at the current epidemiologic curve, assuming that 70 percent of the population is fully immunized (the US is at 50 percent) and the COVID vaccines could offer 99 percent efficacy, which they do not, the number of new COVID cases would still continue to climb if strict public health measures are not also implemented. In such a scenario, the coronavirus would only burn itself out after it had spread into every community by infecting all available people, including children.

In addition to Brilliant, every epidemiological authority on the pandemic has stated in no uncertain terms that mutations are probable, if not inevitable, especially considering the repeated high levels of community transmission across the globe. In such an event, even vaccines and strict public health measures may not curb the spread of emerging strains.

The worrisome week-over-week rising trends in COVID-19 cases across the US, regardless of each states asserted vaccination rates, only confirms in the real-world sense the validity of Dr. Gasperowicz’s conclusions.

Adding the proverbial insult to this gruesome injury, the present situation in the US harks back to the early March days of 2020, when a flawed diagnostic test and lack of meaningful public health measures—contact tracing and isolation, social distancing and mass testing—meant the country was flying blind through the storm of the pandemic.

On Tuesday, the head of the Oxford Vaccine Group, Andrew Pollard, explained that herd immunity is “not a possibility” with the Delta variant. Speaking to the UK’s All-Party Parliamentary Group on coronavirus, he offered these sage words and advice: “We are in a situation with this current variant where herd immunity is not a possibility because it still infects vaccinated individuals. I suspect that what the virus will throw up next is a variant that is perhaps even better at transmitting in vaccinated populations. So, that’s an even more of a reason not to be making a vaccine program around herd immunity.”



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