

Eight dead, hundreds injured in crowd crush at Travis Scott's Astroworld Festival in Houston, Texas

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Eight people died and hundreds more were seriously injured during a performance by rapper Travis Scott on the night of November 5 in Houston, Texas at the Astroworld Festival.

Mobile phone videos show horrific scenes with thousands of concertgoers packed tightly into one undulating mass, held in place by a network of immovable steel barriers. Limp bodies are seen being lifted out of the mass and dumped over the barricade as the show goes on.

“We were in hell,” one young woman said in a video message posted on TikTok (brook333lliott). “We were all suffocating. Everyone was standing on our tiptoes with our chins up, gasping for air. That’s all you could see around you. Our bodies were literally suffocating us so bad that people were bleeding out of their mouth and nose. There wasn’t anything anyone could do. People were screaming bloody murder and begging for help. The floors were covered in bodies.”

Scott has a record of encouraging unsafe behavior at his concerts. In 2015, he pleaded guilty to reckless conduct after telling a crowd at the Lollapalooza festival to jump over security barricades. In 2017, he was arrested for “inciting a riot” which injured fans at a concert in Arkansas, and again pleaded guilty.

The dead include two teenagers—14-year-old John Hilgert and 16-year-old Brianna Rodriguez—as well as Franco Patino (age 21), Axel Acosta (21), Rodolfo “Rudy” Peña (23), Danish Baig (27), and Jacob E. Jurinek. As of Saturday afternoon, five more teenagers and eight adults remained hospitalized.

It is unclear exactly how many people were present at the concert or involved in the crush, but it was likely in the tens of thousands. There were 100,000 tickets sold

for the two-day festival, twice as many as in previous years. Social media videos from earlier in the day also show hundreds of people entering through a broken gateway and running onto the festival grounds without presenting tickets.

In a highly unusual move for a large music festival, Scott was the only act performing at the time of the disaster.

Normally, festivals schedule multiple performances across several stages to more evenly distribute the crowd. On Friday, Astroworld instead concluded all other acts by 8:00 p.m. before displaying a giant countdown timer on the stage where Scott was scheduled to perform.

Many people wrote on social media about what happened next. As the timer approached zero, and tens of thousands of people attempted to get a view of the only active stage, the crowd became dangerously compressed. People report being crushed and passing out before Scott even appeared.

Seanna Faith recounted on Instagram what happened when the rapper took the stage: “Within the first 30 seconds of the first song, people began to drown – in other people... People began to choke one another as the mass swayed... Once one [person] fell, a hole opened up in the ground... Person after person were sucked down. You could not guess from which direction the shove of hundreds of people would come next.” Others wrote of “layers and layers of people” falling and being trampled.

After falling herself, Faith was helped up and escaped over a barricade. She can be seen in multiple mobile phone videos climbing up a ladder leading to a crew member operating a live video camera. She repeatedly

shouts “There’s someone dead in there! Stop the show!” But the worker, who is wearing large headphones over his ears, appears not to understand, and yells at her to get down.

Media accounts of the timeline vary after Scott took the stage at 9:04 p.m. A video analysis by the Daily Beast determined that he performed 25 songs over the course of 90 minutes as the disaster unfolded, and exited the stage at 10:34 p.m.

Several social media videos show groups of people in different parts of the crowd screaming desperately to get Scott’s attention and stop the show. The performer, who is wearing in-ear headphones, did not react to them.

However, at multiple points during the performance, Scott did acknowledge that he saw the ambulance attempting to drive through the crowd. Once, he paused for less than a minute and instructed people to make room for crew members to remove someone, but then he quickly resumed singing. Near the end of his set, he brought out star rapper Drake as a surprise guest, which caused another crush.

Festival staff were unprepared for such a disaster. Madeline Eskins, a festival attendee and an ICU nurse who helped resuscitate people after herself passing out and being saved from the crush, wrote on Instagram that some of the medics “had little to no experience with CPR and didn’t know how to check a pulse... The medical staff didn’t have the tools to do their jobs, and despite the crowd around us trying to get someone to stop the concert they just kept going.”

CNN reported that before the night was over, 300 people were treated at a field hospital set up on the festival grounds. The second day of the festival was canceled on Sunday.

This weekend was the third annual Astroworld Festival, which is organized by Scott and global live music industry giant Live Nation, which took in \$1.8 billion in 2020 amid the pandemic. Last year, Astroworld was canceled amid a surge in COVID-19, when there were 96,000 new cases and 1,000 deaths per day across the US.

This year, it was held despite the fact that there are now more than 70,000 new cases of coronavirus and over 1,200 deaths per day. Tickets sold out within one hour of going on sale, and ranged in price from \$365 to over \$1000 for VIP passes. That is upwards of \$37

million in ticket sales alone.

Scott has an estimated net worth of \$50 million. In November 2020, he appeared on the cover of Forbes magazine’s “30 under 30” issue. His partner Kylie Jenner, who is part of the celebrity Kardashian-Jenner family, has hundreds of millions of dollars in personal wealth.

Although rarely engaging in the fetishization of homicide and brutality that pervades much of hip-hop, Scott’s lyrics are drenched with the worship of hedonism, risk-taking, and living for the moment. The concert’s iconography borrows heavily from horror movies, including a giant, skull-like sculpture of the artist’s head.

One attendee posted on Reddit, “Everything seemed normal for a Travis Scott show. I’ve seen countless people pass out at almost every GA standing room only concert. I didn’t know the people I saw being carried away were lifeless corpses, I thought people were just passing out. Was it overcrowded? Yes but that’s normal. Was it understaffed? Yes but that’s normal. Was it chaotic? Yes but that’s normal. I feel like the crowd became so desensitized and normalized to nothing but rage that it finally caught up to him and everyone involved.”



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