

Delta coronavirus variant overwhelms US hospitals as Omicron variant looms large

Bryan Dyne
10 December 2021

Coronavirus cases in the United States have surged during the first full week of December. After the lull in reporting caused by the Thanksgiving holiday, confirmed daily new cases have jumped more than 30 percent from the end of November. At the time, cases stood at an average of about 90,000 a day and have now risen to just under 120,000.

Hospitalizations have followed suit. Over the past month, hospitalizations have jumped from a recent low of more than 41,000 on November 10 to 57,000 today, including more than 14,000 in intensive care. And deaths have remained high, averaging more than 1,000 per day over the past month.

The rise in hospitalizations has already pushed hospitals across the Midwest and Northeast past their capacity. Geisinger Jersey Shore Hospital is operating at 130 percent, according to the *Williamsport Sun-Gazette*, of these patients 61 percent have COVID-19. The medical center's CEO, Dr. Jaewon Ryu, noted in a press conference Wednesday that, "There was a day at Jersey Shore where every single patient other than one was admitted for COVID."

The *Indianapolis Business Journal* reports that the Indiana University Health system has had to delay thousands of elective surgeries as a result of the state's more than 5,000 daily cases. At Franciscan Health, medical workers have been forced to ration care in order to "match our caseload, both inpatients and outpatients, with available beds and staff on a daily basis."

Indiana has also joined the growing number of states, including Maine, New Hampshire and New York, that have deployed the National Guard to medical centers in the past few days in response to rising COVID-19 hospitalizations. Other states that have called on the National Guard in recent weeks to assist with logistics,

triage and vaccinations include California, Georgia, Kentucky, Oregon, Tennessee and Vermont.

Cases have also been sharply rising in Michigan and New York. Daily new cases in Michigan have doubled since October, spiking from a weekly average of about 4,000 per day to more than 8,000 a day. Deaths have followed suit, rising from an average of 51 a day to more than 100. And according to the Michigan Health & Hospital Association, COVID-19 hospitalizations jumped 88 percent during that same period.

Daily new cases in New York have also risen sharply in the past six weeks, rising from 3,800 on October 28 to more than 9,800 now. And while deaths have remained relatively low, they have still steadily climbed from an average of 35 a day to 53 per day. Hospitalizations, on the other hand, have soared at rates on par with Michigan, increasing 86 percent since November.

Hospitals are also reporting that many of their patients, including those that die, are younger, vaccinated or both. Jim Dover, president and CEO of Sparrow Health System in Michigan, told CNN that 25 percent of coronavirus patients that died at Sparrow hospitals were vaccinated. Katie Sefton, who has been a nurse for 20 years, noted that, "We're seeing a lot of younger people," among fatal cases of the virus. Sefton also warned, "we haven't peaked yet."

There have, however, been no calls for lockdown measures from government officials even as the pandemic races once again across the country. The most stringent measures have been taken in New York, where the state has been forced to announce a new indoor mask mandate, as well as a new vaccine mandate for private employers as cases continue to rise. In contrast, a federal appeals court recently reinstated an executive order by Texas Governor Greg Abbott

banning mask mandates in schools.

Neither the Republicans nor Democrats, however, are genuinely concerned with saving lives. The Biden administration's entire coronavirus policy banked on vaccinations being wholly effective, even in the face of emerging variants. A significant part of this strategy was forcing children back into unsafe schools, well before vaccines were authorized for younger age groups, helped along by Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers union.

The recent surge of the Delta variant in August and September, and the emerging winter surge, have proven this vaccine-only approach to be at best a complete failure, and at worst homicidally negligent. Since Biden took office in January, nearly 380,000 people have died from COVID-19.

Moreover, the current surge has occurred as the new Omicron variant begins to spread. So far, there have been less than 100 confirmed cases of the variant in the United States. Data from where the variant is more widespread, however, including South Africa, the United Kingdom and much of Europe, indicates that this variant is likely four times as infectious as the Delta variant and thus approximately ten times as infectious as the original variant. In South Africa, where the Omicron variant was first detected, the number of cases has skyrocketed from just 270 new cases a day to more than 15,000 in just one month.

A technical briefing from the UK Health Security Agency published on December 10 found a similar trend. The report estimates that by November 30, 1,219 of the 76,200 infections in the UK were caused by the Omicron variant, indicating a doubling time of just 2.5 days. The report then extrapolated the trend of increasing cases, warning that there could be 1 million cases a day by Christmas.

This is a staggering figure. Such sharp exponential growth predicts 3.7 million new infections in the UK in December. And while the infection rate will eventually peak as the virus saturates the population, the extent to which Omicron is capable of spreading raises the possibility of millions or even tens of millions more coronavirus cases in early January. In addition, Omicron has shown to cause reinfections, even among the vaccinated, indicating no one is safe from this incredibly infectious variant.

There is no reason to suspect that a similar situation

will not arise in the United States. Assuming the same doubling time, 100 Omicron cases in the US will become 10,000 cases in just 12 days, 100,000 cases 8 days after that, and 1,000,000 cases 8 days after that. The dangers cannot be overstated and only the most comprehensive and urgent measures taken immediately to stop the spread of disease, above all closing schools and nonessential businesses, are capable of abating the oncoming wave of mass death.



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