

Nearly 4,000 COVID-19 deaths reported in the US on Friday

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A total of 3,896 men, women and children were reported dead on Friday from the coronavirus pandemic, as reported by the BNO News COVID-19 monitor. Those same figures show that COVID-19 deaths in the US have increased by 14.7 percent in the past seven days, the vast majority caused by the Omicron variant.

Hospitals across the US overflowing with COVID-19 patients

COVID-19 hospitalizations in the United States have reached an all-time high with nearly 159,000 Americans currently hospitalized with COVID-19, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released Thursday. Across the country 21,000 people are being admitted to hospitals each day. Currently more than 26,000 patients are in intensive care units (ICUs) nationwide.

The number of hospitalizations is expected to remain high for weeks to come as they lag behind infections. Currently an average of 760,000 people are being infected with the highly contagious Omicron variant every day.

Hospitals across the US are buckling under the crush of admissions, sending out pleas for help, and in some cases shuttering doors to incoming patients as health systems reach the point of collapse. In addition to record-breaking COVID-19 admissions, systems are further strained with large portions of the health care workforce ill and on leave due to COVID-19 infections among themselves and family members.

California

In Southern California, Sharp Chula Vista Medical Center and Scripps Mercy Hospital, two hospitals near the US-Mexico border, were so overwhelmed this week that they refused to accept any more patients and declared internal disaster status.

Scripps Mercy Chief Medical Officer Dr. Ghazala Sharieff told NBC 7 that the hospital was so crowded, patients were overflowing into hallways and surgery recovery rooms. The Sharp health system noted that more than 1,000 health workers were out due to coronavirus-related reasons.

Nurse Sandra Beltran told the *Los Angeles Times* Thursday that at Olive View-UCLA Medical Center in the Sylmar neighborhood of Los Angeles, patients were at times waiting 20 to 30 hours for a bed after arriving in the emergency room, creating a long domino effect as the systems become compounded with skyrocketing numbers of patients needing care. She also noted that “People are being seen in the hallway... It’s tiring. You’re literally, for 12 hours, going from room to room.”

Demand for emergency care has reached new heights not seen even in last winter’s devastating surge. Last week California was averaging nearly 47,000 visits a day in its emergency rooms while a year ago the figure was 32,000.

Orange County public health officials report that at least 15 child patients are battling COVID-19 at Children’s Hospital of Orange County, the “highest number ever.” Dr. Clayton Chau, director of the Orange County Health Care Agency, told a press conference this week that 14 of the 15 children hospitalized are in the intensive care unit. A third child under five died in December from COVID-19 complications.

Georgia

At Georgia’s largest hospital, workers describe a nightmare of “wall-to-wall stretchers” in the emergency room. Dr. Robert Jansen, chief medical officer at Grady Health System, where capacity is at 110 percent, told the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, “We have no capacity left in the hospital.” The Grady Hospital has been forced to divert ambulances to other hospitals. “That has a huge impact on the rest of the city,” Jansen noted, because “Grady is the trauma center for Atlanta.”

“One of the myths we keep hearing is that it isn’t that

serious,” Jansen said. “Perhaps it isn’t for some folks who are lucky. But COVID-19 is having a tremendous impact on underlying disease. For those patients who have other diseases such as heart failure, diabetes, sickle cell anemia or are immunocompromised, if they get infected, they get incredibly sick.”

A handful of top doctors in Atlanta made extraordinary pleas on Thursday to the public, stressing the need for vaccination, boosters and measures to reduce coronavirus infections. Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta physician Dr. Andrea Shane informed the public about the terrible rise in pediatric hospitalizations. “In the past three, four weeks, we’ve seen more than a hundred children with post-COVID complications,” Shane told WSB-TV, stressing, “The way to prevent MIS-C is to prevent COVID-19.”

Texas

Meanwhile, smaller cities and rural areas are crying for help as their hospitals cannot provide higher-level care which is needed for severe COVID-19 infections. In Laredo, Texas, the city’s health authority, Dr. Victor Trevino, said that his biggest concern was how the Omicron variant infects greater numbers of children under 18 and that the city still lacks a pediatric ICU. Trevino noted that a six-week-old baby tested positive for a COVID-19 infection and was being treated at an emergency room.

“We will not be able to handle another week of this without additional staff,” he told the *Laredo Morning Times*. Northeast

Northeast

The situation has become so dire at health systems across the country that in numerous states the National Guard has been called in while states make calls for volunteers to come into hospitals.

Yesterday the Delaware Healthcare Association (DHA) issued a statewide call for volunteer signups to assist in the state’s hospitals. “In times of crisis, Americans have always come forward and pitched in,” Wayne Smith, DHA president & CEO, wrote in a statement. “The hour of need is upon us. Delaware hospitals need your help to meet the great challenge that visits us and must be met. The COVID-19 crisis strains hospital staff and resources. WE NEED YOUR HELP!”

In Maine, 169 Army National Guard members began arriving at hospitals Thursday to assist with non-clinical roles such as patient transport and cleaning.

The short staffing pertains not just to nurses, but entire hospital systems are breaking down as lab workers, janitorial staff and cafeteria staff go out sick. The procurement of lab results or clean linens are difficult and further delay care as patients begin to fill hallways. Patients are sometimes waiting days to be admitted and get a bed.

The situation at health systems has reached such a breaking point that numerous hospitals are making plans to convert pediatric ICUs at children’s hospitals into adult ICUs within the coming months. Tufts Children’s Hospital in Massachusetts announced yesterday that it will close down its children’s services and convert 41 pediatric beds to adult medical/surgical and ICU beds in response to “changing patient needs.”

As hospitals are strained, patients in need of critical care are having to wait for long hours and even days for critical care.

Tony Tsantinis, 68, died at Harrington Hospital in Southbridge, Massachusetts, last month from COVID-19 after his kidneys started to fail and the hospital was unable to provide dialysis. What was needed was a bed that could provide a higher level of care. Seventeen other hospitals were called to see if they could treat Tsantinis, but they were all full and he could not obtain access to a bed and soon died.

His daughter Rona Tsantinis-Roy told NPR that when a doctor delivered the tragic news that her father was dead, he “literally looked me in the eyes and said this didn’t have to happen.” Her father may very well have survived if he had been able to be transferred to another hospital.

Two years after the initial discovery of COVID-19 and a year after the distribution of vaccines began, hospitals are in the worst condition they have seen. In addition to short staffing due to illness, many nurses and health care workers have resigned after years of suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

The Biden administration has not made any great effort to stop the spread of COVID-19, instead adopting the “herd immunity” policies pursued by the Trump administration. Instead of raising the alarm as the globe learned about the new Omicron variant, the ruling class insisted on the “mild” character of the variant, and have doubled down on keeping schools and workplaces open as the virus spreads like wildfire through the population. The mass illness and 2,000 lives lost each day to COVID-19 must be seen as a social crime carried out against the working class.



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