

As COVID-19 surges, deaths exceeded births in half of US states

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The United States saw an additional 2,611 deaths from COVID-19 on Tuesday, bringing the death toll from the virus to 894,880, according to Worldometer. The US leads the world in pandemic deaths as it fast approaches 1 million lives lost from the disease.

Compared to last winter's peak, US cases of COVID-19 are dramatically higher, up 266 percent, hospitalizations have just surpassed the previous record, while deaths, a lagging indicator, are at 62 percent of last January's worst days, according to *New York Times* data. There has been a 35 percent increase in COVID-19 deaths over the past two weeks.

New York registered the highest number of deaths from COVID-19 of any state on Wednesday, at 387, with 2,189,795 active cases. Other northeastern states continued to rank near the top in new deaths, with Pennsylvania reporting 189 deaths; Massachusetts, 155; and New Jersey, 151.

While cases per 100,000 residents have fallen in the Northeast since January 10, cases in the Midwest and South have declined only marginally in this period. Cases in the West have remained steady, although in California cases are up 358 percent compared to last winter's surge.

Locations with the highest hospitalization increases since last winter include Washington D.C., up 224 percent; Nevada, 161 percent; Alabama, 152 percent; West Virginia, 151 percent; and Missouri, 150 percent.

The devastation wrought by the pandemic has also led to an unprecedented situation in which deaths exceeded births in half of all US states in 2020. A study in May 2021 by the University of New Hampshire's Carsey School of Public Policy found, "In 2020, the impact of COVID-19 contributed to a record 3,376,000 deaths in the United States: 18 percent more than in 2019," and that "births diminished by 4 percent to

3,605,000 in 2020."

The surplus of births over deaths added just 229,000 to the US population in 2020, a decline of 74 percent compared to 2019. Combined with a decrease in immigration, this decline produced the smallest annual percentage population gain in at least a century.

In five states—Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and West Virginia—the decline in births compared to deaths began in 2019 and continued this trend in 2020. It is not coincidental that New England and Appalachia have been hard hit by the opioid crisis and "deaths of despair" in addition to pandemic.

In 2020, deaths exceeded births in 20 additional states. These states are all over the map, from New England, to the Midwest, South, Southwest and Northwest. As deaths rose, fertility declined sharply as women delayed pregnancies as the pandemic took hold. In December 2020 there were 8 percent fewer births than in December 2019. Researchers suggest a similar reduction in the birth rate in January 2020.

Michigan, which Tuesday added 17,639 COVID-19 cases and 223 deaths, is one of the states that actually saw more people die than were born in 2020, the first that this has happened since at least 1900. To date, Michigan has lost 31,762 lives to COVID-19.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services reports in preliminary data that 104,166 people were born in the state in 2020 while 117,087 people died, for a net decline of 12,921. The pandemic has brought to the tipping point a situation that has existed for decades in which the birthrate has declined while deaths have risen.

"This is not a shock," Kurt Metzger, demographer and director emeritus of Data Driven Detroit, told the *Detroit News*. "We've been talking about this coming for some time now." With the decimation of industrial

jobs, particularly in the auto industry, people have been leaving Michigan in droves in search of jobs.

Even with a net gain in population numbers from 2010 to 2020, Michigan lost a seat in the US House of Representatives because other states, including Montana, Oregon and Florida, grew faster in numbers. Estimates from the US Census Bureau indicate that there were about 17,000 fewer people in July 2021 than in July 2020. A decline in population will translate into fewer federal dollars for social programs and schools.

“It is, overall, this aging population in Michigan and the inability to attract young, educated workers that has been a characteristic of the state for quite a while and it doesn’t seem to be changing at all,” Metzger told the *Detroit Free Press*.

Hospitalizations in Michigan have risen 117 percent since last winter’s peak. Like states across the US, hospital staff are burned out, leaving the profession and succumbing to COVID-19 themselves after two years of battling COVID-19.

Sparrow Hospital in Lansing is the sixth hospital in the state to receive a federal medical team. A 25-member team from the Department of Defense will be brought in on February 7 for 30 days to provide support in the surge brought on by the Omicron variant. Teams have already been brought in at Beaumont Hospital, Dearborn; Spectrum Health in Grand Rapids; Covenant HealthCare in Saginaw; Mercy Health Muskegon; and Henry Ford Hospital in Wyandotte.

Like other states, instead of shutting down nonessential businesses and schools to stop the spread of the coronavirus and put an end to the pandemic, Michigan officials have allowed the virus to proliferate, sicken and kill.

In an interview with the *Free Press*, Michigan Health Department Director Elizabeth Hertel repeated the call for ineffectual mitigations, urging “Michiganders to do their part to support our state’s health care workers by getting vaccinated and boosted, if eligible, wearing a mask in public indoor settings regardless of vaccination status, social distancing and staying home and getting tested regularly.”

Mississippi is another state that saw a decline in the birth-to-death ratio in 2020. *World Nation News* reports on the situation at Singing River Health System, a county-owned network of three small hospitals on Mississippi’s Gulf Coast, where 106 coronavirus

patients were being treated on Sunday.

In Pascagoula, 40 percent of all COVID-19 tests came back positive over the weekend. The latest wave of Omicron has kept almost every emergency hospital in Mississippi full to overflowing. Patients seeking treatment for COVID-19 will find a similar situation at hospitals across the country.

Pascagoula is home to the state’s largest private, single-site employer, Ingalls Shipbuilding, owned by Huntington Ingalls Industries. The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers rammed through a sellout four-year contract extension at the Ingalls shipyard in December.

An exodus of registered nurses at Pascagoula Hospital, the city’s only emergency care facility, has left a third of all beds unavailable. Recovering COVID-19 patients have been unable to leave the ICU because there are no other beds available for them, while critically ill patients in the emergency room could not be moved to the ICU.

The shortage of health care workers has been particularly severe at small, non-profit hospital systems like Singing River. Kelly Cambest, a registered nurse in the ER, said he had received only one application for 24 positions in his department in the recent period.



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