

U.S. coronavirus cases near 4 million as death toll tops 1,000 for second day

23 July 2020, by Robin Foster and E.j. Mundell, Healthday Reporters



(HealthDay)—As America neared the milestone of 4 million coronavirus cases on Thursday and the daily death toll topped 1,000 for the second day running, states across the country scrambled to contend with the spread of COVID-19.

California recorded new highs in both coronavirus cases and deaths on Wednesday, *The New York Times* reported. With more than 422,000 cases, California's case tally has now eclipsed that of New York, the early epicenter of the U.S. pandemic.

Other states posted records as well: Missouri, North Dakota and West Virginia recorded their highest daily case numbers on Wednesday, while Alabama, Idaho and Texas reported daily COVID-19 death records, the *Times* said.

In the face of climbing case counts and deaths, President Donald Trump on Wednesday announced the federal government will provide \$5 billion to vulnerable nursing homes to help them counter the virus, the *Associated Press* reported.

"I want to send a message of support and hope to every senior citizen," Trump said during a coronavirus task force briefing on Wednesday. "The light is starting to shine and we will get there very quickly."

The \$5 billion is part of a package that includes efforts to boost testing of nursing home staff, provides states a weekly list of facilities with increased COVID-19 cases, and offers additional training and support for the homes. Nursing homes in hotspots will get priority for the new funds, the *AP* reported.

Meanwhile, three states that have been slammed by the pandemic in recent weeks continued to struggle to handle surges of COVID-19 patients in their hospitals, *CNN* reported.

Hospitalizations in Florida have risen by more than a third in the 12 days since the state started releasing daily hospitalization data. There are now more than 9,500 people hospitalized with COVID-19 in Florida and least 53 hospitals in 27 counties said they had no more beds available in their ICUs, *CNN* reported. Miami-Dade County has exceeded its ICU capacity, with 130% occupancy this week, [state officials](#) reported.

In California, hospitalization rates and the number of patients in ICUs are again reaching highs, with increases of 1.9% and 0.7% respectively, according to the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), *CNN* reported.

Texas is faring no better: hospitals in that state are facing an unprecedented wave of hospitalizations—it is the only state in the country with more than 10,000 hospitalizations at the moment.

Testing delays bedevil efforts to curb spread

Across the country, laboratories are being crushed by the surge of coronavirus tests, the *AP* reported.

The bottlenecks are creating problems for workers kept off the job while awaiting results, nursing homes struggling to keep the virus out, and for the labs themselves. Some labs are taking weeks to return COVID-19 results, fueling fears that people without symptoms could be spreading the virus if they don't isolate while they wait.

"There's been this obsession with, 'How many tests are we doing per day?'" former CDC Director Dr. Tom Frieden told the *AP*. "The question is how many tests are being done with results coming back within a day, where the individual tested is promptly isolated and their contacts are promptly warned."

Frieden and other public health experts have called on states to publicly report testing turnaround times, calling it an essential metric to measure progress against the virus.

In an effort to find a faster and cheaper way of testing Americans, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has given emergency approval to pooled testing, which combines test samples in batches, the *AP* reported.

With pooling, laboratories would combine parts of samples from several people and test them together. A negative result would clear everyone in the batch. A positive result would require each sample to be retested.

The technique works best when fewer than 10% of people are expected to test positive, the *AP* reported. For example, pooling would not be cost-effective in Arizona, where a surge has pushed positive test results to well over 10%.

More states, retailers turning to mask mandates

As case counts and deaths have continued to climb, more states, cities and major retailers have turned to face mask mandates to try to stem the spread of COVID-19.

Roughly two-thirds of states now require face coverings to be worn in public, with Ohio, Indiana and Minnesota the latest to introduce statewide mask mandates, the *Washington Post* reported.

Increasingly seen as a last hope to slow soaring infection rates across the country, Gov. Asa Hutchinson of Arkansas announced a face covering requirement last week after taking a more hands-off approach for months, the *Times* reported. Colorado Gov. Jared Polis also issued a mask order last week, after questioning whether such a mandate would be enforceable.

And Alabama, Montana and the city of Tulsa moved to make face coverings required in public settings, the *Post* reported. Several large retailers also joined the trend: Walmart, Kroger and Kohl's, Target and CVS now require all customers in their stores to wear masks.

The new mask mandates suggest that officials and [business leaders](#) across America are painfully aware that cases have spiked in 41 states over the past two weeks and things will only worsen if nothing is done, the *Times* reported.

Still, Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp went against the tide and nullified all local mask mandates last week, the *Post* reported. That same day, Georgia recorded its second-highest number of coronavirus cases since the start of the pandemic, with 3,871 new infections reported.

By Thursday, the U.S. coronavirus case count neared 4 million as the death toll passed 143,000, according to a *Times* tally.

According to the same tally, the top five states in coronavirus cases as of Thursday were: California with over 422,528; New York with over 413,500; Florida with more than 379,600; Texas with over 366,500 and New Jersey with over 179,500.

Nations grapple with pandemic

Elsewhere in the world, the situation remains challenging.

Spain's coronavirus infection rate has tripled since restrictions were lifted at the end of June, the *Post* reported.

This spring, Spain had managed to contain its outbreak with strict lockdown measures. But over

the past three weeks, the country has gone from having eight cases for every 100,000 residents to 27 cases per 100,000 residents, *Reuters* reported.

Many of the new clusters have been found in Catalonia and are linked to nightlife and large gatherings, health officials said. The Catalan regional government has asked residents to stay at home when not conducting essential business and to limit gatherings to groups of fewer than 10 people.

Meanwhile, Hong Kong has tightened social distancing measure, following a sudden surge in infections there, the *Post* reported. Carrie Lam, the city's chief executive, told residents they now must wear face masks in all indoor public spaces, and she said nonessential government employees should work from home.

Things continue to worsen in India. On Thursday, the country passed 1.2 million infections and nearly 30,000 deaths, a Johns Hopkins tally showed. The surge comes weeks after a national lockdown was lifted, and it has prompted some parts of the country to revert back to stricter social distancing measures. Only the United States and Brazil have higher caseloads.

Brazil is also a hotspot in the coronavirus pandemic, with more than 2.2 million confirmed infections by Thursday, according to the Hopkins tally. It has the second-highest number of cases, behind only the United States.

Cases are also spiking wildly in Russia: As of Thursday, that country reported the world's fourth-highest number of COVID-19 cases, at over 793,700, the Hopkins tally showed.

Worldwide, the number of reported infections passed 15 million on Thursday, with nearly 624,000 deaths, according to the Hopkins tally.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on the [new coronavirus](#).

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APA citation: U.S. coronavirus cases near 4 million as death toll tops 1,000 for second day (2020, July 23) retrieved 6 December 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-07-coronavirus-cases-million-death-toll.html>

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