

World coronavirus cases rocket past 9 million as pandemic accelerates

By Bryan Dyne
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The number of confirmed coronavirus cases yesterday rocketed past 9 million as the pandemic accelerates in every corner of the world, an increase of one million cases in seven days. The number of known deaths now stands at more than 469,000. Both these figures are on track to surpass the ghastly milestones of 10 million cases and 500,000 deaths later this week.

The sharpest uptick in new cases continues to be in Eastern Europe, South Asia, North America and South America. The United States has the most new cases of any country, closely followed by and sometimes exceeded by Brazil. And while India has a lower count of new cases, that number is increasing sharply, and the official figures are undoubtedly a gross underestimate in a country of 1.3 billion people with only rudimentary health care infrastructure.

These countries similarly lead the world in number of new deaths, along with Chile, Peru, Russia, Pakistan, the United Kingdom and Iran. Globally, the seven-day moving average of daily deaths has never gone below 4,000 since the beginning of April and is again trending upwards. The seven-day moving average of daily cases has not gone below 100,000 since March 27 and will soon surpass 150,000.

The dangers of the pandemic were sharply expressed on yesterday's edition of NBC's "Meet the Press" program by Dr. Michael Osterholm, the director of the Center of Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota. "I don't think this is going to slow down. I'm not sure the influenza analogy applies anymore," he said, developing his position from his earlier work which attempted to model the spread of the coronavirus based on how the flu spreads. "I don't think we're going to see one, two and three waves—I think we're just going to see one very, very difficult forest fire of cases."

Dr. Scott Gottlieb, a former commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, noted on CBS's *Face the Nation*: "We're seeing the positivity rates go up. That's a clear indication there is now community spread underway, and this isn't just a function of testing more."

The increased counts of new cases and deaths is not just a function of the virulence of the contagion, but also a result of the reopenings forced by governments everywhere, spearheaded by state governors and especially by President Trump. This was exemplified by Trump's reelection campaign rally held in Tulsa, Oklahoma, on Saturday, which went ahead in defiance of warnings from public health officials. There, Trump took the opportunity to again blame China for the cases and deaths in the United States, referring to the disease as the "Chinese virus" and the "kung flu."

Little mention was made of the rising number of either total cases and deaths, which stands at 2.3 million and 120,000 in the United States, respectively, or the expanding hot spots of the disease in Arizona, California, Florida and Texas. Trump instead demanded the number of new cases be artificially deflated by reducing the amount of testing done in the country. After boasting that the US had performed 25 million tests, he said, "When you do testing to that extent, you will find more cases. So I said to my people, 'Slow the testing down, please.'"

While such actions might temporarily produce figures "proving" Trump's assertions that the virus will just "go away" at some point, the virus itself is unhindered by such cynical political calculations. In fact, during the past week at least 12 states have hit new record highs at least once, and 21 hit record seven-day averages. This includes states that have already been hard hit such as California, which saw 4,515 new cases

yesterday, as well as states that have not had as many infections, such as Oklahoma and Missouri, which also reported on Sunday 478 new cases and 397 new cases, respectively.

Florida and Texas continue to have among the highest rates of new cases. While this figure had decreased and plateaued in Florida during May, there has been a sharp rise in this number since the start of June. Every week, a new high is reached for the number of daily cases, and the total number of cases has begun to increase exponentially.

It is also worth noting that Trump is set to deliver his national convention speech on August 27 in Jacksonville, Florida, in an arena that holds 15,000 people. Little weight has been given to warnings from the PolicyLab at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia that the state "has all the makings of the next large epicenter."

Texas is facing a similar crisis and now regularly has at least 3,000 new cases per day. Houston itself, the fourth-largest city in the country, has now recorded more than 1,000 new cases per day for the past three days. Lina Hidalgo, the top elected official of Harris County, which includes Houston, warned that there is "significant, uncontrolled spread" of the coronavirus in the county and spoke of "very disturbing trends" in the number of hospitalizations. There are more than 3,200 COVID-19 hospitalizations statewide.

Officials from multiple states have noted that the surge in new cases is being driven in part by the increasing number of young people being tested and found to be asymptomatic. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis noted this during a press conference Friday, admitting that in the early stages of the outbreak in the state, "there wasn't a lot of testing done." At the time, only those above 65 and showing symptoms were tested, thus missing the cases and transmission by anyone younger who had contracted the disease.

The large amount of asymptomatic transmission among those in their 20s and 30s is especially concerning considering that colleges and universities across the United States are already planning to bring their students back to their campuses in the fall. There are about 20 million college students in the United States, and while current epidemiological evidence suggests that smaller numbers of them will get sick compared to older people, the fact that universities

bring together so many people from across the country and around the world means there is a massive risk they could become epicenters of the disease very quickly.

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