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www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

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By Bryan Dyne
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United States rockets past 100,000 daily cases

Daily confirmed coronavirus cases in the United States have surpassed 100,000 according to the Worldometer dashboard. This is the second day in a row of record case numbers. On each of these days, more cases were recorded than the total number of cases in China for the past 10 months.

There were more than 500,000 confirmed coronavirus cases in the United States over the past seven days, measured both by daily new case counts and the seven-day running average. Nearly 9.3 million cases have been reported in the US, including 1 million in just the past 14 days.

Amid skyrocketing cases nationally, El Paso, Texas County Judge Ricardo Samaniego, the county's top elected official, on Thursday ordered a two-week shutdown of nonessential businesses, starting that day at midnight. The shutdown is in response to the spike in cases in the county, which has suffered more than 1,000 new cases each day for the past week.



Nurse Debbi Hinderliter (left) collects a sample from a woman at a coronavirus testing site near the nation's busiest pedestrian border crossing, August 13, 2020, in San Diego [Credit: AP Photo/Gregory Bull]

During a press conference announcing El Paso's new public health measures, Samaniego said, "Our hospitals are at capacity, our medical professionals are overwhelmed, and if we

don't respond we will see unprecedented levels of death." He added, "We need to build capacity for hospitals, build capacity, to shore up contact tracing and identify hot spots."

To date, the county has seen more than 45,000 infections, accounting for more than 6 percent of its population, and 612 of its residents have died. As a result of the recent rise in coronavirus infections, local hospitals have been forced to airlift patients without COVID-19 to other areas to free up bed space. These hospitals include the University Medical Center, the William Beaumont Army Medical Center and the Medical Center of the Americas, all of which make up critical parts of the health care infrastructure of the broader West Texas and southern New Mexico region.

The services to be closed in the county include gyms, restaurants, tattoo parlors and hair and nail salons. Grocery stores, health care facilities, government operations and all election-related activities will remain open. Schools are also considered "essential" under the order, despite the fact that nationally tens of thousands of teachers, parents and students have been infected and hundreds have died thanks to the spread of the virus caused by in-person learning.

That the order came into effect five days before an election is a further indication of the seriousness of the situation in El Paso. No doubt considerable pressure was brought to bear by the state leadership, which is Republican and generally supportive of President Donald Trump, to delay a shutdown until after votes had been cast in order to not tarnish the image Trump has been promoting that the US is "rounding the final turn" in the fight against the deadly contagion.

To perpetuate this myth, Donald Trump Jr. appeared on Laura Ingraham's Fox News show on Thursday and claimed that the number of deaths caused by the pandemic each day is "almost nothing." At a campaign rally in Michigan on Friday, the president himself said that "doctors get more money if somebody dies from COVID," making the spurious claim that frontline health care workers, facing daily danger as they fight the virus, are inflating the deadliness of the pandemic for their own financial gain.

In reality, more than 800 people are dying a day in the US from COVID-19, and more than 235,000 have lost their lives since the pandemic began. It was not doctors, but Trump and his nominal opponents in the Democratic Party who lied about the coronavirus, concealing in January and February the dangers of the disease in order to protect US corporate interests until a plan to bail out Wall Street to the tune of \$6 trillion could be hatched.

In the aftermath of Samaniego's order, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton tweeted that the county judge "has no authority to shut down business in El Paso County" and that the judge is in "direct violation of [Governor Greg Abbott's] executive order" that all businesses are to be open at 75 percent capacity. The tweet concluded ominously, "My office is exploring all legal actions."

The sharp rise in cases and hospitalizations in El Paso reflects trends nationwide. Approximately a quarter of US counties have reported a peak of new cases in the past month, and a further quarter have reported a peak in new cases during the past week. This includes the majority of counties in several states in the Midwest and Mountain West, including Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming and Montana.

Moreover, hospitals across the country are nearing or at their capacity to properly treat coronavirus infections. An internal report from the Department of Health and Human Services obtained by NPR reveals that hospital beds in metropolitan areas such as Atlanta, Minneapolis and Baltimore are 80 percent full, and that certain hospitals in cities such as Tampa, Birmingham and New York City have reached 95 percent ICU (intensive care unit) capacity.

The report reveals that other metrics showing the strain on medical resources are also increasing. Ventilator usage and use of inpatient and ICU beds have all increased by up to 16 percent in the past month, and 24 percent of hospitals nationwide are at 80 percent of their ICU capacity. If these numbers continue to increase, which they will as the pandemic continues to spread, death rates will begin to skyrocket, because resources will not be available to treat patients. Scenes similar to those in northern Italy in March and New York City in April—when patients died in hallways and bodies were stored in refrigerated trailers—will be repeated across the US.

At the same time, insurance companies have begun to crack down on coronavirus treatments. A hospital worker, who spoke to the WSWS on condition of anonymity, told us, “Insurance companies are clamping down on tests we are ordering.” The worker continued, “CT scans, imaging, etc. They don’t want to pay,” forcing workers to pay medical bills upwards of hundreds of thousands or even millions of dollars, or die.

Coronavirus cases, deaths and hospitalizations are also skyrocketing internationally. More than 50 countries are now reporting at least 1,000 new cases on a daily basis, and 15 countries report at least 10,000 daily cases. Eight countries—the United States, India, Brazil, Russia, France, Spain, Argentina and Colombia—have more than 1 million total cases and the United Kingdom will likely join this group over the weekend. There have been in total 45.5 million cases of COVID-19 since the pandemic began, and this number is on course to increase by three or four million every week.

The number of deaths worldwide are also on the rise, including a steady increase from just under 5,000 a day at the beginning of October to more than 6,000 each day, and heading toward the catastrophic highs seen in April. In total, 1.19 million human beings have died from the disease.

In the midst of the rising cases and death toll, the World Health Organization convened its most recent Emergency Committee on COVID-19 and reaffirmed that “the pandemic still constituted a public health emergency of international concern.” Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus called for an increase of “partnership across the world to drive science, solutions and solidarity” so as to end the pandemic.

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