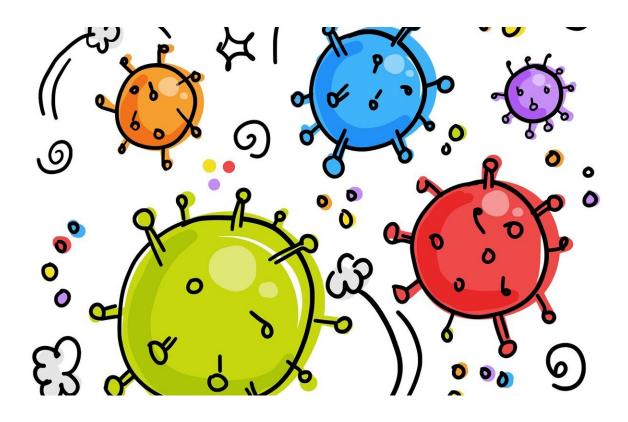# Florida reports 10,000 coronavirus cases for 1st time

July 2 2020, by Terry Spencer, Curt Anderson and Kelli Kennedy

Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Florida reported more than 10,000 new confirmed coronavirus cases for the first time Thursday, an unwanted milestone eclipsed hours before Vice President Mike Pence and Gov. Ron DeSantis meet in Tampa to discuss the state's response to the disease.

The [10,109 new cases](link) are 500 more than the old mark set last week and six times higher than where the daily record stood less than a month ago and just one indication the virus is spreading.

The state also reported 67 virus-related deaths Thursday, as the seven-day average for daily fatalities is now back over 40, a 30% increase from two weeks ago. The state's death rate had declined from 60 per day in May to 30 two weeks ago before it began creeping up. The Health Department also tallied 325 new coronavirus hospitalizations Thursday, one of the biggest 24-hour jumps since the pandemic began.

Since March 1, the state has seen more than 169,000 confirmed cases and 3,718 deaths. Before June 11, the state's worst day for reported cases had been 1,601, set in mid-May. That number has been eclipsed every day for the last three weeks.

The spikes caused DeSantis to reclose bars to sit-down service, several counties to close their beaches for the Fourth of July weekend and numerous municipalities to order the wearing of masks in public spaces, a mandate that some opponents are challenging in court. For the first time, a state legislator is known to have tested positive.

The outbreak also forced Pence and DeSantis to curtail their visit, which was supposed to be part of the vice president's now-canceled "Faith In America" campaign tour. DeSantis is a strong ally of President Donald Trump. Now he and Pence will visit a medical training center at the University of South Florida.

Earlier Thursday, Florida Democrats criticized the coronavirus response from the White House and DeSantis as needlessly endangering lives by opening up too soon and not mandating safety measures such as masks.

"They have put politics ahead of public health," said U.S. Rep. Donna

Shalala, who was Health and Human Services secretary under President Bill Clinton. "Why are we in this situation? Because we didn't do the right thing at the beginning. We needed at the beginning to hit this virus with a hammer."

Meanwhile, Palm Beach County is being sued over its new ordinance requiring masks be worn in crowded public spaces. The opponents say the ordinance violates their rights to free speech, privacy and personal autonomy and endangers their health by lowering their oxygen levels. They also question whether the pandemic exists.

The county commission passed the ordinance unanimously last week over the objection of opponents whose often angry claims were [broadcast nationally.](#)

"Pandemics, like the purported COVID-19 pandemic, are nothing new or novel," the opponents' attorneys wrote. Neither the state nor the county has ever mandated the wearing of masks to stop the spread of disease, they wrote, "and there is no new evidence that is possible."

The county doesn't comment on pending lawsuits, but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other medical experts have recommended that masks be worn as they lessen the chance the wearer will spread the virus. They also strongly dispute that masks cause harm. About 130,000 Americans have died from COVID-19 and almost 3 million have contracted it since February.

DeSantis has repeatedly encouraged Floridians to wear masks but has refused to issue a statewide order. He says that action is best left to local leaders as some small, rural counties have few cases and no need for a mandate.

Dr. Mary Jo Trepka, a Florida International University epidemiologist,

said she is glad some officials are mandating masks and hopes Floridians are cautious over the Fourth of July weekend.

"We are going to be in a very difficult situation for at least a month," she said. "The behavior of people this (weekend) will be very critical. People really have to avoid congregating in groups and be sure to wear masks."

State Rep. Shevrin Jones, a Broward County Democrat, tested positive Wednesday, becoming the first-known Florida legislator to catch the virus. He had gone to the emergency room with fever, chills and trouble breathing.

"I felt awful," Jones said Thursday. Jones, 36, said he should be fine since he's young and healthy, but fears for his parents and others. He encouraged DeSantis to slow his push to reopen the economy.

"We need to relook at how we are opening," he said. "The next phase shouldn't happen right now."

Because of the virus, many holiday plans are being scuttled. Megan Archer, a 39-year-old West Palm Beach resident who lost her job with a county parks department during the outbreak, said her family is not planning any outings, even though they are sick of being inside.

"It's hard for us to do the right thing, but we know we have to protect our family," she said.