

Months into crisis, Americans face frustrating test delays

July 8 2020, by Christopher Weber



Lines of cars wait at a drive-through coronavirus testing site, Sunday, July 5, 2020, outside Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens, Fla. Florida health officials say the state has reached a grim milestone: more than 200,000 people have tested positive for the novel coronavirus since the start of the outbreak. (AP Photo/Wilfredo Lee)

For two weeks, Rachel Weeks has stayed home, going without a

paycheck while waiting and waiting for the results of a COVID-19 test from a pharmacy near Philadelphia.

"I'm just so disappointed. I just don't know how—with the resources and the people we have and the money we have—we can't get this right," she said.

Four months, 3 million confirmed infections and over 130,000 deaths into the U.S. [coronavirus](#) outbreak, Americans confronted with an alarming resurgence of the scourge are facing long lines at testing sites and going a week or more without receiving a diagnosis. Some sites are running out of kits as testing is ramped up.

Labs are reporting shortages of materials and don't have enough workers to process the tests, leading to severe backups that could worsen as economies reopen and new infections emerge.

The number of tests per day in the U.S. is up to about 640,000 on average, an increase from around 518,000 two weeks ago, according to an Associated Press analysis. New confirmed infections per day in the U.S. are running at over 50,000, breaking records at practically every turn.

In an especially alarming indicator, the percentage of tests coming back positive for the virus is on the rise across nearly the entire country, hitting almost 27% in Arizona, 19% in Florida and 17% in South Carolina.



Medical workers suit up with protective personal equipment as they prepare to administer COVID-19 antibody tests and diagnostic tests at a converted vehicle inspection station, Tuesday, July 7, 2020, in San Antonio. Local officials across Texas say their hospitals are becoming increasingly stretched and are in danger of becoming overrun as cases of the coronavirus surge. (AP Photo/Eric Gay)

As more people are tested, an increase in the raw number of positive tests is to be expected. But if the virus is being under control, then the percentage of positive results should be coming down.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services this week said it will open free testing sites in three cities that are seeing significant increases in cases and hospitalizations—Jacksonville, Florida; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; and Edinburg, Texas.

In Georgia, one of the states where cases are surging, officials are rushing to expand testing capacity as demand rises sharply and threatens to overwhelm six major sites around Atlanta, said DeKalb County CEO Michael Thurmond.

"If you project this out over the next three weeks, we can't handle it," he said.

New Orleans residents were turned away from a city testing site after it reached its daily allotment of 150 tests within five minutes of opening one recent morning. Health care providers are running low on trays and chemicals needed to run machines used in the tests.



Customers wear masks as they wait to enter the first Starbucks store, which is a popular tourist destination, Tuesday, July 7, 2020, at Pike Place Market in

Seattle. Tuesday was the first day of a new statewide order that requires people to wear masks or other facial coverings inside businesses in hopes of slowing the spread of the coronavirus. Business owners who fail to refuse service to customers who don't wear masks can face fines or lose their business license, but some business owners have raised concerns about turning away customers. (AP Photo/Ted S. Warren)

"There are still supply chain issues with getting these products from China and other places," said the city's health director, Dr. Jennifer Avegno.

Tests are still being done at a daily rate well above the number needed to meet federal standards for a community the size of New Orleans, she said. But Avegno said she fears that the progress New Orleans—an early hot spot in the outbreak—made in flattening its curve could be reversed.

The delays are becoming an everyday disruption.

Jon DiMuzio underwent a [test](#) 10 days ago at a walk-up site in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, ahead of a planned July Fourth trip to see his family in Philadelphia. He ended up canceling the visit because the results didn't come in time and he didn't want to put his relatives at risk. He still had not received a diagnosis on Tuesday.



Lines of cars wait at a drive-through coronavirus testing site, Sunday, July 5, 2020, outside Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens, Fla. Florida health officials say the state has reached a grim milestone: more than 200,000 people have tested positive for the novel coronavirus since the start of the outbreak. (AP Photo/Wilfredo Lee)

"Last Wednesday, they told me I should know by Friday or Saturday," DiMuzio said. "Yesterday, they said, 'You should know today or tomorrow,' and they said the same thing today."

An unexpected surge in testing demand caused people to be turned away last week from a drive-up site outside Tropicana Field in St. Petersburg, Florida. It ran out of test kits within one hour. Gov. Ron DeSantis said the problem is being addressed.

Residents of minority communities say there is a severe shortage of

testing in their neighborhoods, far from middle-class areas where most chain pharmacies and urgent care clinics offering tests are found. In Arizona hundreds of people lined up last week for a large-scale testing event in a low-income area of Phoenix that is heavily Hispanic and Black.

North Carolina now will allow residents to undergo coronavirus testing without a doctor's referral, a move made to encourage more Black, Hispanic and Native American residents to get tested. The state is also creating of up to 300 free temporary testing sites throughout July.



COVID-19 antibody testing and diagnostic testing are administered at a converted vehicle inspection station, Tuesday, July 7, 2020, in San Antonio. Local officials across Texas say their hospitals are becoming increasingly stretched and are in danger of becoming overrun as cases of the coronavirus surge. (AP Photo/Eric Gay)



Motorists queue up for blocks to take advantage of free COVID-19 testing outside the Pepsi Center early Tuesday, July 7, 2020, in Denver. (AP Photo/David Zalubowski)



A health care worker carries a stack of clipboards at a COVID-19 testing site sponsored by Community Health of South Florida at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Clinica Campesina Health Center, during the coronavirus pandemic, Monday, July 6, 2020, in Homestead, Fla. (AP Photo/Lynne Sladky)



Cars line up for coronavirus testing at Hansen Dam Recreation Center, Tuesday, July 7, 2020, in Los Angeles. (AP Photo/Mark J. Terrill)



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Ricardo Sojuel waits for a coronavirus swab as workers start to dismantle a mobile COVID-19 testing unit, Thursday, July 2, 2020, in Lawrence, Mass. (AP Photo/Elise Amendola)



Members of the Mississippi Health Response Team take down medical information from people potentially affected by COVID-19 incidences at the Mississippi Legislature at the Capitol in Jackson, Miss., Monday, July 6, 2020. House Speaker Philip Gunn confirmed Sunday that he had recently tested positive for COVID-19. A makeshift drive-thru testing center was set in place on Capitol grounds. (AP Photo/Rogelio V. Solis)

Testing delays forced baseball's defending champion Washington Nationals and reigning American League champion Houston Astros to call off training camp practices on Monday after the teams didn't receive test results from Friday. The St. Louis Cardinals also scrubbed their workout for similar reasons.

Patrick Friday, a United Methodist minister in Alabama, went to several

hospitals and clinics in Birmingham this week to get checked after his middle-school-age son tested positive for the virus. But he was told that unless he had a preexisting condition, he didn't qualify.

Finally, through word of mouth, he ended up at a site offering rapid-result tests. His negative result came back quickly, but he found the experience frustrating.

"We are several months into this. How can it be that we can't go in and get a test?" he asked Tuesday. "At this point it seems like we have a lot of gaps that need to be closed in a hurry."

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