

U.S. sees another record-breaking day of new coronavirus cases

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(HealthDay)—States across America reported nearly 60,000 new

coronavirus cases on Thursday, setting yet another daily record as the pandemic tightens its grip on a country struggling to reopen.

The surge has been largely fueled by states in the South and the West that eased their lockdowns early, *The New York Times* reported.

Single-day case records were set in at least six states on Thursday: Alabama, Idaho, Missouri, Montana, Oregon and Texas, the *Times* reported. Meanwhile, two states recorded their highest death tolls for a single day: Florida recorded 120, while Tennessee recorded 22.

In Texas, a record for new cases was set for the fourth consecutive day, with more than 10,900 infections reported, the newspaper said.

Hospitals across the South and West are being flooded with COVID-19 patients and are having to cancel elective surgeries and discharge patients early as they try to keep beds available, the *Times* reported.

In Florida, more than 40 intensive care units in 21 counties have hit capacity and have no beds available. In Mississippi, five of the state's largest hospitals have already run out of ICU beds for critical patients, the *Times* reported.

Things are also dire in Texas, the *Times* reported.

"The hospitals are full," said Dr. Esmaeil Porsa, president and chief executive officer of the two-hospital [public health system](#), Harris Health, based in Texas. "We have been over capacity for a couple of weeks."

'It just keeps adding'

To try to address the shortage of beds, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott on Thursday ordered an increase in hospital bed capacity in nearly 100

counties, extending a ban on elective procedures to new corners of the state, the *Times* reported.

Even though regular wards are being converted into intensive care units and long-term care facilities are being opened for patients too sick to go home, doctors say they are barely managing, the newspaper said.

"When hospitals and health care assistants talk about surge capacity, they're often talking about a single event," John Sinnott, chairman of internal medicine at the University of South Florida and chief epidemiologist at Tampa General Hospital, told the *Times*. "But what we're having now is the equivalent of a bus accident a day, every day, and it just keeps adding."

While hospital beds are easily converted for ICU use, the more difficult challenge is having enough advanced practice nurses who are qualified to care for such patients and equipment such as ventilators, hospital experts told the *Times*.

Hospitals can "pivot enough space," Jay Wolfson, a professor of public health at the University of South Florida, explained. "The trick is going to be staffing. If you get people burned out, they get sick, then you lose critical care personnel."

Beds aren't the only thing hospitals are running out of now: Roopa Ganga, an infectious disease specialist at two hospitals near Tampa, told the *Times* that they lacked sufficient supplies of the proven COVID-19 medication remdesivir, forcing her to choose which patients needed it the most. Patients were also being discharged "aggressively," sometimes returning in worse shape a few days later.

"About five people came back in one week last week," she said. "That is making me feel like, you know, you got to slow down."

New lockdowns needed?

The climbing case numbers prompted Dr. Anthony Fauci to tell the *Wall Street Journal* this week that lockdowns might be wise in some spots.

"Any state that is having a serious problem, that state should seriously look at shutting down," he said.

If coronavirus testing centers across the country are any indication of how worried Americans are, hours-long lines are now being seen at many sites, according to the *Washington Post*. In many cities, a combination of factors are stretching testing centers to their limits: a shortage of key supplies, backlogs at laboratories that perform the tests, and surging infection counts as cases climb in almost 40 states.

Even as Florida's total caseload neared 232,000 by Friday, Walt Disney World in Orlando announced it plans to reopen on Saturday, the *Times* reported.

Parades, fireworks and most indoor shows at the park have been suspended, and there will be no hugs with costumed characters, park officials said. Fingerprint scanners will not be used at park entrances, they added.

"COVID is here," said Josh D'Amaro, Disney's theme park chairman. "We have a responsibility to figure out the best approach to safely operate in this new normal."

'Pooled' testing strategy tried

One new strategy that U.S. health officials plan to adopt is "pooled" coronavirus testing, the *Times* reported. The decades-old method would

vastly increase the number of virus tests performed in the United States.

Instead of carefully rationing tests to only those with symptoms, pooled testing would allow frequent surveillance of asymptomatic people, the newspaper reported. Mass identification of coronavirus infections could hasten the reopening of schools, offices and factories.

With pooled testing, nasal or saliva swabs are taken from large groups of people. Setting aside part of each individual's sample, a lab then combines the rest into a batch holding five to 10 samples each. If a pooled sample yields a positive result, the lab would retest the reserved parts of each individual sample that went into the pool, pinpointing the infected person, according to the *Times*.

"We're in intensive discussions about how we're going to do it," Fauci told the *Times*. "We hope to get this off the ground as soon as possible."

A handful of states have actually brought the virus under control after being slammed in the early stages of the pandemic. Determined to keep case counts low, New York, Connecticut and New Jersey have said they will mandate quarantines for travelers coming from states that are experiencing large spikes in new cases, the *Times* said.

By Thursday, the U.S. coronavirus case count passed 3.1 million as the death toll passed 133,000, according to a *Times* tally.

According to the same tally, the top five states in coronavirus cases as of Wednesday were: New York with more than 404,000; California with over 303,000; Texas with more than 240,000; Florida with over 232,700; and New Jersey with over 176,000.

Vaccine research makes headway

Meanwhile, the search for an effective vaccine continues.

The [federal government](#) will pay Novavax \$1.6 billion to speed development of 100 million doses of a coronavirus vaccine by the beginning of next year, the *Times* reported Tuesday.

The deal is the largest that the Trump administration has made so far with a company as part of Operation Warp Speed, a federal effort to make coronavirus vaccines and treatments available to the American public as quickly as possible, the *Times* said.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) had already said that it would provide up to \$1.2 billion to the drug company AstraZeneca to develop a potential coronavirus vaccine from Oxford University, in England.

That research agreement funds a clinical trial of the potential vaccine in the United States this summer with about 30,000 volunteers, the *Times* reported.

The goal? To make at least 300 million doses that could be available as early as October, the HHS said in a statement.

The United States has already agreed to provide up to \$483 million to the biotech company Moderna and \$500 million to Johnson & Johnson for their vaccine efforts. It is also providing \$30 million to a virus vaccine effort led by the French company Sanofi, the *Times* reported. Moderna said a large clinical trial of its vaccine candidate could begin in July.

Nations grapple with pandemic

Elsewhere in the world, the situation remains challenging.

Even as the pandemic is easing in Europe and some parts of Asia, it is worsening in India. India recorded nearly 25,000 new coronavirus infections on Thursday, its highest single-day total yet. The country now has the third-highest number of COVID-19 cases, with almost 794,000 infections, the *Times* reported.

Brazil has also become a hotspot in the coronavirus pandemic, with over 1.7 million confirmed infections by Friday, 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 Friday, that country reported the world's fourth-highest number of COVID-19 cases, at nearly 713,000, the Hopkins tally showed.

Worldwide, the number of reported infections passed 12.2 million on Friday, with more than 550,000 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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