

Virus crisis easing across Sun Belt but could heat up again

September 1 2020, by Matt Sedensky



In this Aug. 6, 2020, file photo, Hialeah Fire Department Firefighter-Paramedic Laura Nemoga, right, winces as medical assistant Jesus Vera performs a COVID-19 test at Hialeah Fire Station #1, in Hialeah, Fla. The torrid coronavirus summer across the Sun Belt is easing after two disastrous months that brought more than 35,000 deaths. (AP Photo/Wilfredo Lee, File)

The torrid coronavirus summer across the Sun Belt is easing after two disastrous months that brought more than 35,000 deaths. Whether the outbreak will heat up again after Labor Day and the resumption of school and football remains to be seen.

Seven of the nine states along the nation's Southern and Western rim are seeing drops in three important gauges—new deaths, new cases and the percentage of tests coming back positive for the virus. Alabama is the only state in the region to see all three numbers rising; Mississippi's deaths are up, but positive rates and cases are dropping.

In Florida, where reported deaths from COVID-19 are running at about 114 a day on average, down from a peak of 185 in early August, Gov. Ron DeSantis went so far as to announce Tuesday that he is easing the state's 5-month-old ban on visitors to nursing homes.

"Part of having a healthy society is understanding that human beings seek affection," DeSantis said, his voice cracking at times as he wondered aloud whether his actions contributed to the suffering by separating the elderly from their loved ones. He paused for about 20 seconds to collect himself.

The governor also said the number of people in the hospital in Florida with COVID-19 is down nearly 60% from its peak in July, and new cases on Monday dropped below 2,000, the lowest daily total since mid-June.

The U.S. leads the world in both coronavirus deaths and confirmed infections after a spring outbreak centered around New York, followed by the flareup across the Sun Belt over the summer.



In this July 1, 2020, file photo, a waitress takes a food order from the kitchen at Slater's 50/50 in Santa Clarita, Calif. Gov. The torrid coronavirus summer across the Sun Belt is easing after two disastrous months that brought more than 35,000 deaths. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez, File)

As of Tuesday, there were more than 25.3 million confirmed cases and over 850,000 deaths worldwide, according to the tally kept by Johns Hopkins University, with the U.S. accounting for more than 6 million infections and 183,000 of the dead.

About 68,000 of the U.S. deaths have come since the start of summer, with the number of infections among Americans nearly tripling in the same period.

"It's been a summer of fire, not ice," said Dr. William Schaffner, an infectious-disease expert at Vanderbilt University in Nashville. "If anything, we've learned that this virus is even nastier than we thought it was in the spring."

Texas alone amassed more than 10,000 virus deaths in July and August, Florida added over 7,600, and California recorded nearly 7,000. The Sun Belt also includes Arizona, New Mexico, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia.

States across the region began to make progress against the virus after suspending or rolling back business reopenings and taking a harder line on mask-wearing and social distancing.

Americans are now heading into Labor Day weekend, the unofficial end of summer, knowing the threat isn't gone as fall brings a return to school, college and sports.



In this July 16, 2020, file photo, two physician assistants work at a COVID-19 drive-thru testing site set up at the Anaheim Convention Center in Anaheim, Calif. The torrid coronavirus summer across the Sun Belt is easing after two disastrous months that brought more than 35,000 deaths. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong, File)

"We'll be struggling with COVID. I don't know whether it will surge in the winter, but it certainly will stick around," Shaffner said.

Health experts pinned some of the blame for the summertime surge on Memorial Day and Fourth of July gatherings, and now they worry that Labor Day will contribute to the virus's spread.

Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves and the state's epidemiologist, Dr. Paul

Byers, held a news conference Monday in which they implored people to avoid big Labor Day parties.

"I think all we are is just a moment away from us all forgetting and getting tired of doing the things that have gotten us this far," Byers said.

Elsewhere around the South, Alabama recorded more than 1,200 deaths in July and August. Deaths are down from their late July peak but are trending upward again, running at an average of about 23 a day.

Dr. Donald Williamson, president of the Alabama Hospital Association, said the state is seeing several warning signs since the return of students to schools and colleges and the resumption of high school football. He said the question is whether the state can avoid a spike that fills intensive care beds in hospitals.



In this Aug. 25, 2020, file photo, a cyclist, wearing a mask to prevent the spread of the new coronavirus, rides by an entrance to the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Fla. The torrid coronavirus summer across the Sun Belt is easing after two disastrous months that brought more than 35,000 deaths. (AP Photo/Wilfredo Lee, File)

"If we were to see the same effect from Labor Day, we would be in worse shape than we were after July Fourth," said Williamson. "It's a higher baseline."

Diego Lozano, 28, of Phoenix, is among those who had his summer travel plans changed by the outbreak. Each year, he joins his parents and grandfather in visiting relatives in the Mexican state of Morelos. But for his grandfather, 75-year-old Lorenzo Lomas Perez, it was his final journey.

Perez died in late July at a Phoenix hospital of complications from COVID-19, and his family brought his remains with them to Mexico.

Because of coronavirus restrictions, there was no traditional open casket ceremony inside a church; the rites were held outside in the cemetery. Only relatives were allowed to attend, when normally the entire village would be expected to come.

"We put him in an urn and then we buried the urn," Lozano said.

Among other coronavirus developments Tuesday:



In this July 12, 2020, file photo, vehicles wait in line at a COVID-19 testing site at the Miami Beach Convention Center during the coronavirus pandemic in Miami Beach, Fla. The torrid coronavirus summer across the Sun Belt is easing after two disastrous months that brought more than 35,000 deaths. (AP Photo/Lynne Sladky, File)

— New York City, with 1.1 million public school students, delayed the start of in-person instruction for a week and a half until Sept. 21 to give teachers more time to prepare, under a deal with the union.

— Millions of children across Europe and beyond returned to school. In France and the Balkan countries, mask rules are in place for many children, while other nations have taken a more relaxed stance. Some classrooms have plastic shields around desks and warning signs

everywhere.

— In India, many states relaxed lockdown restrictions to allow more businesses to reopen and ease the economic pain, though the country's daily count of new infections is the highest in the world.

— Public tours of the White House, halted nearly six months ago, are set to resume Sept. 12.

© 2020 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed without permission.

Citation: Virus crisis easing across Sun Belt but could heat up again (2020, September 1)
retrieved 27 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-09-virus-crisis-easing-sun-belt.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.