

Daily COVID-19 deaths in US reach highest level since May

November 20 2020, by David Crary and Paul J. Weber



In this Nov. 19, 2020, file photo, EMT Giselle Dorgalli, third from right, performs chest compression on a patient who tested positive for coronavirus in the emergency room at Providence Holy Cross Medical Center in the Mission Hills section of Los Angeles. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong, File)

The surging coronavirus is taking an increasingly dire toll across the U.S.

just as a vaccine appears close at hand, with the country now averaging over 1,300 COVID-19 deaths per day—the highest level since the calamitous spring in and around New York City.

The overall U.S. death toll has reached about 254,000, by far the most in the world. Confirmed infections have eclipsed more than 11.8 million, after the biggest one-day gain on record Thursday—almost 188,000. And the number of people in the hospital with COVID-19 hit another all-time high at more than 80,000.

With health experts deeply afraid Thanksgiving travel and holiday gatherings next week will fuel the spread of the virus, many states and cities are imposing near-lockdowns or other restrictions. California ordered a 10 p.m.-to 5-a.m. curfew starting Saturday, covering 94% of the state's 40 million residents.

The Texas border county of El Paso, where more than 300 people have died from COVID-19 since October, is advertising jobs for morgue workers capable of lifting bodies weighing 175 pounds (79 kilograms) or more. Officials are offering more than \$27 an hour for work described as not only physically arduous but "emotionally taxing as well."

The county had already begun paying jail inmates \$2 an hour to help move corpses and has ordered at least 10 refrigerated trucks as morgues run out of room.



In this Nov. 19, 2020, file photo, healthcare workers process people waiting in line at a United Memorial Medical Center COVID-19 testing site in Houston. The surge of coronavirus is taking an increasingly grim toll across the United States, even as of a vaccine appears close at hand. (AP Photo/David J. Phillip, File)

COVID-19 deaths in the U.S. are at their highest level since late May, when the Northeast was emerging from the first wave of the crisis. They peaked at about 2,200 a day in late April, when New York City was the epicenter and bodies were being loaded onto refrigerated trucks by forklift.

Among the newly infected was President Donald Trump's eldest son, Donald Trump Jr., who a spokesman said Friday has no symptoms and

has been quarantining since learning of his diagnosis earlier this week.

Amid the bleak new statistics, Pfizer said Friday it is asking U.S. regulators to allow emergency use of its COVID-19 vaccine, setting in motion a process that could make the first, limited shots available as early as next month, with health care workers and other high-risk groups likely to get priority.

But it could take months before the vaccine becomes widely available. Pfizer has said the vaccine appears 95% effective at preventing the disease.



In this Nov. 19, 2020, file photo, ventilator tubes are attached to a COVID-19 patient at Providence Holy Cross Medical Center in the Mission Hills section of Los Angeles. The surge of coronavirus is taking an increasingly grim toll across

the United States, even as of a vaccine appears close at hand. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong, File)

In Texas, Republican Gov. Greg Abbott has ruled out another shutdown and singled out El Paso county leaders for not enforcing restrictions already in place. The state's attorney general, Ken Paxton, likened the county's chief administrator to a "tyrant" after Paxton won an appeals court ruling blocking local leaders from shutting down gyms and other nonessential businesses.

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine, also a Republican, failed to persuade leaders of the GOP-controlled legislature to reject a bill that would limit his administration's power to deal with the crisis.

At issue is a Senate bill that would ban the state health department from issuing mandatory quarantine orders enforced against people who are not sick or exposed to disease—such as the order announced by the governor Tuesday setting a 10 p.m. curfew.

DeWine said he will veto the bill when it reaches his desk. Republicans in both the House and Senate have enough votes to override the veto if they choose.



In this Nov. 19, 2020, file photo, registered Nurse Kristina Shannon, from left, chaplain Andrea Cammarota, and Emergency Room charge nurse Cathy Carter watch as medical workers try to resuscitate a patient who tested positive for coronavirus in the emergency room at Providence Holy Cross Medical Center in the Mission Hills section of Los Angeles. The surge of coronavirus is taking an increasingly grim toll across the United States, even as of a vaccine appears close at hand. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong, File)

"This bill is a disaster," DeWine said Thursday. "This is not a bill that can become law."

In California, the curfew affects 41 of the state's 58 counties. Its impact will depend heavily on voluntary compliance. Some county sheriffs said they won't enforce it the rules for people not on essential errands to stay

home after 10 p.m.

The curfew is less strict than the near-total ban on nonessential business and travel that Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom imposed in March, which he credited with flattening the rate of COVID-19 cases.

Rocco Temasamani, who was selling jewelry Friday at San Diego's Ocean Beach, said the curfew will do little to curb the coronavirus and will instead anger people who consider it government overreach.

He thinks the order will rankle supporters of President Donald Trump who are already agitated by the president's claims of election fraud and back his hands-off approach to regulating behavior during the pandemic.



Travelers walk through the nearly empty JetBlue terminal at Logan Airport, Friday Nov. 20, 2020, in Boston. In Massachusetts, the state agency that operates Boston's Logan Airport says it must cut about 25% of its workforce amid a \$400 million budget deficit brought on by a steep drop in travel during the pandemic. (AP Photo/Michael Dwyer)

"It's really, really throwing gasoline on a fire," said Temasamani, who was skeptical that police will enforce the curfew.

Michael Maring, an auto mechanic from El Centro, California, who was visiting San Diego, said he will obey the curfew, despite his fondness for 2 a.m. bike rides, because he doesn't want trouble with police. Like Temasamani, he thinks authorities will be reluctant to enforce the new measure.

In Kansas, new cases have risen to an average of over 2,700 per day, nearly four times higher than a month ago.

"Our hospitals are overwhelmed with coronavirus patients. Health care workers are burned out," Democratic Gov. Laura Kelly said Friday.

In rural western Kansas, the number of people seeking testing at a Kearny County clinic doubled over the past week to about 80 per day, said Dr. Lane Olson, a family practice doctor.



In this Nov. 19, 2020, file photo, a nurse carries a COVID-19 test back for processing at PrimaryOne Health in Columbus, Ohio. The surge of coronavirus is taking an increasingly grim toll across the United States, even as of a vaccine appears close at hand. (Joshua A. Bickel/The Columbus Dispatch via AP, File)



In this Nov. 19, 2020, a jogger runs through a shopping district in Santa Monica, Calif. California Gov. Gavin Newsom is imposing an overnight curfew as the most populous state tries to head off a surge in coronavirus cases. On Thursday, Newsom announced a limited stay-at-home order in 41 counties that account for nearly the entire state population of just under 40 million people. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez, File)

He said nurses had to make multiple calls this week before the University of Kansas Hospital, about 360 miles (580 kilometers) away in Kansas City, Kansas, agreed to take one of his coronavirus patients whose oxygen levels were falling. Then several more calls were needed to find an air transport company that could fly her there.

In the state capital, Topeka, the emergency department at Stormont Vail

Hospital has taken over a back hallway and a waiting room, with some patients waiting hours to be moved to a regular room. The crunch has area officials considering opening a field hospital.

In Arizona, four Democratic mayors urged Republican Gov. Doug Ducey to impose a statewide requirement for people to wear masks in public. The move came as health officials reported more than 4,000 additional COVID-19 cases for the second consecutive day.

Ducey's chief of staff, Daniel Scarpinato, pushed back on the request, saying the mayors are doing little to enforce their own mask ordinances or ensure that existing safety measures put in place by the governor are being enforced.

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