

Texas becomes 1st state to surpass 1 million COVID-19 cases

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In this Oct. 26, 2020, file photo, a medical worker stands at a COVID-19 state drive-thru testing site at UTEP, in El Paso, Texas. The U.S. has recorded about 10.3 million confirmed infections, with new cases soaring to all-time highs of well over 120,000 per day over the past week. (Briana Sanchez/The El Paso Times via AP, File)

Texas became America's first state Wednesday with more than 1 million confirmed COVID-19 cases, as sporting events were canceled and the border city of El Paso added mobile morgues in anticipation of virus deaths overwhelming hospitals for weeks.

Texas leaders gave no indication of forthcoming restrictions as the state passed the grim milestone and recorded more than 10,800 new cases on Tuesday, which set a new daily record and is the highest since July. The virus that is surging throughout the U.S. has been unsparing across Texas: The top county official in Fort Worth is pushing to halt youth and school sports, and medical tents were set up outside hospitals for the first time in the rural Panhandle.

"We were certainly hoping we would be in a bubble and not have to go through the things that larger communities were having to deal with because we were in—quote—rural Texas," said Cory Edmondson, president and CEO of Peterson Health in Kerrville.

"But that quickly came to a halt, and we realized we're not immune to this," said Edmondson, whose hospital in the Texas Hill Country now often has more than 10 COVID-19 patients admitted, double the usual number.

State health officials Wednesday reported 6,779 patients in hospitals, a spike of 609 in one day—one of the highest one-day bumps since the state started keep track.

Texas has recorded 1,010,364 coronavirus cases and more than 19,300 confirmed deaths since the pandemic began in early March, according to data from Johns Hopkins University. Only Illinois has averaged more new cases than Texas over the past two weeks.

Texas recently surpassed California, the most populous state, in

recording the highest number of positive coronavirus tests. The true number of infections is likely higher because many people haven't been tested, and studies suggest people can be infected and not feel sick.

A spokeswoman for Republican Gov. Greg Abbott said he was relying on "data-driven hospitalization metrics" and that the state was working to help areas with rising caseloads. Abbott has not held a press briefing about the virus since September, when he announced that he was lifting more restrictions on restaurants and gyms.

"The reality is, COVID-19 still exists in Texas and across the globe, and Texans should continue to take this virus seriously and do their part by social distancing, washing their hands, and wearing a mask," Abbott spokeswoman Renae Eze said.

In El Paso, where more than 1,000 virus patients are hospitalized, local officials have shut down tattoo parlors, hair and nail salons and gyms—all steps that are beyond what Abbott has allowed. The state is fighting the move that Republican Attorney General Ken Paxton says is "oppressing" the border county of about 840,000 people, but local officials won a brief reprieve Wednesday when the Texas Supreme Court refused to make an expedited ruling.

El Paso County officials this week announced plans to add four additional morgue trailers, bringing the total number there to 10.

Disruptions to college football programs in Texas are also mounting, with more games postponed or canceled. The latest came Tuesday when No. 5 Texas A&M had its game this week against Tennessee rescheduled for Dec. 12 after Texas A&M reported at least three players or staff members tested positive. The University of Texas-El Paso also announced that it would move a Nov. 20 home game against Alabama-Birmingham to Midland—more than 300 miles (480 kilometers)

away—because of the surging number of cases along the border.

New cases around Dallas climbed above 1,200 for a third consecutive day, prompting the county's top elected official to urge more residents to work from home.

"We are staring down the barrel of the largest spike we have seen to date in COVID cases," Dallas County Judge Clay Jenkins said.

In rural Kerrville, Edmondson said his 124-bed hospital has been able to manage the uptick in cases but worried that numbers could worsen. He described a fatigue within the nine counties his hospital serves with the virus and restrictions.

In Lubbock County, home of Texas Tech University, health officials reported a surge of nearly 3,400 new cases last week. That is nearly 80% of the number of cases reported over the same span in Harris County, which has a population 16 times larger, and hospital tents were being set up in the area, [alarming local officials](#).

"We know how to do this. Please. I can absolutely assure you that never in my career did I think we would be deploying field hospitals to Lubbock, Texas," Lubbock City Manager Jarrett Atkinson told television station KCBD.

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