Texas surpasses 20,000 virus deaths, second highest in US

November 16 2020, by By: Acacia Coronado

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 surpassed 20,000 confirmed coronavirus deaths Monday, as COVID-19 continues to surge in the United States.

That is the second-highest death count overall in the U.S., trailing only New York, according to researchers from Johns Hopkins University. It's the 22nd-highest per capita at 69.7 deaths per 100,000 people.

So far, Texas leaders have given no indication of forthcoming restrictions to keep people from gathering and spreading the virus. Instead, Republican Gov. Greg Abbott in recent days has been emphasizing that new therapeutics and vaccines are expected to become available soon.

A state appeals court last week sided with Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton and lifted a local shutdown order in El Paso, where mobile morgues are being trucked in to help overwhelmed hospitals and funeral homes.

The El Paso county morgue reached out to the El Paso Sheriff's Department for help after it became "overwhelmed," according to El Paso Sheriff's Department Public Affairs Director Chris Acosta. Inmates of the county's detention facility "were asked to help for a stipend of $2 an hour," Acosta said in a statement.

According to Acosta, between four and eight participants of the detention facility's trustee program have volunteered daily since Nov. 9. She said they are accompanied by a sheriff deputy and two detention officers and are provided with personal protective equipment. The volunteers are minimum custody inmates with misdemeanor offenses, Acosta said, and their volunteer service is temporary "since we are waiting for the National Guard to take over."

Texas also became America's first state to record more than 1 million

confirmed COVID-19 cases last week. It also 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.

During the summer, people with COVID-19 overwhelmed hospitals in Houston and in the Rio Grande Valley, along the border with Mexico. But in the fall case numbers dipped, and Abbott began relaxing some coronavirus restrictions, allowing restaurants and gyms to let more people inside. He also let county leaders decide if they wanted to reopen bars at 50% capacity.

Since then, the virus has spread.

Over the past two weeks, the rolling average number of daily new cases has increased by 3,430.4, an increase of 53.6%.

Texas now ranks 31st in the country for new cases per capita, with 428.3 new cases per 100,000 people over the past two weeks. One in every 417 people in Texas tested positive in the past week.