

Florida breaks record with more than 21,000 new COVID cases

August 1 2021, by Mike Schneider



Signage stands at the ready (foreground) in case COVID-19 testing at Barnett Park reaches capacity, as cars wait in line in Orlando, Fla., Thursday, July 29, 2021. The line stretched through the park for more than a mile out to West Colonial Drive near the Central Florida Fairgrounds. Orange County is under a state of emergency as coronavirus infections skyrocket in Central Florida. The Barnett Park site is testing 1,000 people a day and has closed early in recent days due capacity limits. Credit: Joe Burbank/Orlando Sentinel via AP

Florida reported 21,683 new cases of COVID-19, the state's highest one-

day total since the start of the pandemic, according to federal health data released Saturday, as its theme park resorts again started asking visitors to wear masks indoors.

The state has become the new national epicenter for the virus, accounting for around a fifth of all new cases in the U.S. as the highly contagious delta variant of the coronavirus continues to spread.

Republican Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has resisted mandatory mask mandates and vaccine requirements, and along with the state Legislature, has limited local officials' ability to impose restrictions meant to stop the spread of COVID-19. DeSantis on Friday barred school districts from requiring students to wear [masks](#) when classes resume next month.

The latest numbers were recorded on Friday and released on Saturday on the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [website](#). The figures show how quickly the number of cases is rising in the Sunshine State: only a day earlier, Florida reported 17,093 new daily cases. The previous peak in Florida had been 19,334 cases reported on Jan. 7, before the availability of vaccinations became widespread.

The state reported 409 deaths this week, bringing the total to more than 39,000 since its first in March 2020. The state's peak happened in mid-August 2020, when 1,266 people died over a seven-day period. Deaths usually follow increases in hospitalizations by a few weeks.



A group waits to get a COVID-19 test, Saturday, July 31, 2021, in North Miami, Fla. Federal health officials say Florida has reported 21,683 new cases of COVID-19, the state's highest one-day total since the start of the pandemic. The state has become the new national epicenter for the virus, accounting for around a fifth of all new cases in the U.S. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has resisted mandatory mask mandates and vaccine. Credit: AP Photo/Marta Lavandier

DeSantis has blamed the surge on a seasonal increase—more Floridians are indoors because of the hot weather with air conditioning circulating the virus. About 60% of Floridians 12 and older are vaccinated, ranking it about midway among the states.

The Florida Hospital Association said Friday that statewide COVID-19 hospitalizations are nearing last year's peak, and one of the state's largest

health care systems, AdventHealth's Central Florida Division, this week advised it would no longer be conducting nonemergency surgeries in order to free up resources for COVID-19 patients.

Universal Orlando Resort and SeaWorld on Saturday became the latest theme park resorts in Florida to again ask visitors to wear masks indoors, with Universal also ordering its employees to wear face coverings to protect against COVID-19, which has been surging across the state.



Cars line up at Miami Dade College North campus' COVID-19 testing site, Thursday, July 29, 2021, in Miami. Hospital admissions of coronavirus patients continue to soar in Florida with at least two areas in the state surpassing previous peaks reached during last summer's surge. Credit: AP Photo/Marta Lavandier

All workers at Universal's Florida park on Saturday started being required to wear masks while indoors as the employees returned to practicing social distancing. The home to Harry Potter and Despicable Me rides also asked visitors to follow federal and local health guidelines by voluntarily wearing face coverings indoors.

"The health and safety of our guests and [team members](#) is always our top priority," Universal said in a statement.

Health officials on Friday announced that coronavirus cases in Florida had jumped 50% over the past week with COVID-19 hospitalizations in the state nearing last year's peak.

SeaWorld on Saturday posted on its website that it was recommending that visitors follow recently updated federal recommendations and wear [face coverings](#) while indoors.

The change in policy this week at the theme park resorts came after the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommended that everyone wear masks indoors, regardless of vaccination status.



Raquel Heres gets a COVID-19 rapid test to be able to travel overseas, Saturday, July 31, 2021, in North Miami, Fla. Federal health officials say Florida has reported 21,683 new cases of COVID-19, the state's highest one-day total since the start of the pandemic. The state has become the new national epicenter for the virus, accounting for around a fifth of all new cases in the U.S. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has resisted mandatory mask mandates and vaccine. Credit: AP Photo/Marta Lavandier



In this Thursday, Oct. 22, 2015 file photo, park guests relax and cool off with a water mist under the globe at Universal Studios City Walk in Orlando, Fla. Universal Orlando Resort and SeaWorld are the latest theme park resorts in Florida to again ask visitors to wear masks indoors, with Universal also ordering its employees to wear face coverings to protect against COVID-19, which has been surging across the state. All workers at Universal's Florida park on Saturday, July 31, 2021 started being required to wear masks while indoors as the employees returned to practicing social distancing. Credit: AP Photo/John Raoux



Cars wait in line for COVID-19 testing at Barnett Park, in Orlando, Fla., Thursday, July 29, 2021. The line stretched through the park for more than a mile to the entrance to the Central Florida Fairgrounds. Orange County is under a state of emergency as coronavirus infections skyrocket in Central Florida. The Barnett Park site is testing 1,000 people a day and has closed early in recent days due to reaching capacity. Credit: Joe Burbank/Orlando Sentinel via AP

Crosstown rival Walt Disney World started requiring employees and guests older than 2 to wear masks on Friday, but it also went a step further. The Walt Disney Co. said in a statement that it will be requiring all salaried and non-union hourly employees in the U.S. who work on site to be fully vaccinated.

Disney employees who aren't already vaccinated will have 60 days to do so and those still working from home will need to show proof of vaccination before returning. Disney said it was discussing the vaccine requirements with the union, and added that all new hires will be required to be fully vaccinated before starting work at the company.

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