

# COVID-19 cases are increasing in Dallas: Here's what to know

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In recent weeks, Dallas has seen an increase in reported cases of COVID-19 and increased levels of the virus in wastewater. The spread is part of an annual summer wave, according to doctors and officials, and there are many ways to protect against infection amid the uptick in cases.

Dallas County had 78 positive COVID-19 cases reported daily on a seven-day rolling average last week, according to the Dallas County Health and Human Services website, which was last updated Aug. 9. But this number doesn't tell the full story.

In March, the government stopped requiring providers to report test results for COVID-19. Reporting cases is now voluntary, and most [home tests](#) go unreported.

"One could certainly surmise ... that people are testing positive at home," said Steve Love, president of the Dallas-Fort Worth Hospital Council. "Probably there are a few more cases out there than people know."

## **Answers in wastewater**

After reporting requirement changes, wastewater surveillance is an important resource for understanding infection. Wastewater surveillance involves testing sewage for a virus to track its presence in a community.

Wastewater data collected from Dallas' central water treatment plant showed levels of coronavirus increased by nearly tenfold from May to August, according to data from WastewaterSCAN.

Increasing levels of the virus in wastewater were higher in Texas than in the region and the country in the last 45 days, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Wastewater Surveillance System.

Dr. Trish Perl, professor at the school of public health at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, said wastewater data is a "canary in the coal mine" for understanding how COVID-19 cases are trending.

"Generally we see that go up about two to three weeks before we start seeing a lot of human cases," Perl said.

National positivity rates are also increasing. The CDC estimated in July that COVID-19 infections are growing or likely growing in 35 states and territories, including Texas. National trends for test positivity, emergency department visits, hospitalizations and deaths due to COVID-19 all increased this summer, according to CDC data.

## **A summer wave**

While an increase in cases has been observed in Dallas, it's not necessarily a spike, said Dr. Philip Huang, director of the county's health department.

"We know it's been going up, but it's certainly not at the levels of what we've seen in the past," Huang said.

Love said the increase seen last summer will likely come next summer, too. With more travel and hotter weather that encourages staying indoors, transmission of COVID-19 tends to increase in the summer months.

"It's nothing to panic about," Love said.

While cases are increasing, the COVID-19 hospital admission level is still low for Dallas County, according to the CDC. But hospitalizations and even deaths are still reported from the virus.

"We aren't seeing a lot of hospitalized cases, but we are seeing some," Perl said. "I think there's this sense that people aren't getting really sick anymore. ... It's true that we're not seeing as much severe disease, but it is affecting some people very seriously."

## **What to know about vaccines**

The summer increase in COVID-19 cases may also be due to waning protection from the vaccine as more time passes between shots, Huang said. This makes it especially important to get an updated vaccine when it becomes available.

The new vaccine should be coming out later this month or in September, Perl said, and the CDC recommends everyone ages 6 months and older receive it. Perl said it's especially important to get vaccinated if you're immunocompromised or have a high-risk condition, or if you are often in contact with people in those groups.

Huang advises getting caught up on all recommended vaccines ahead of a new school semester. The county has several community vaccination clinics, and other vaccine options can be found at [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov).

Updated vaccines can also protect against specific circulating variants.

The current circulating strains are all descendants of omicron, Perl said. In the national data, the KP.3 variant is most prominent, according to Perl, and in Dallas County, JN.1 and LB.1 strains are also circulating. Local data showed KP strains were most prominent in the county, she said.

"The new vaccine that will be coming out has been reformulated to target these KP strains," Perl said. "The initial data from animals really suggests that it's much more effective ... against what's circulating."

## **What to know about long COVID**

Perl said clinics treating patients with long COVID, an illness where

symptoms persist for an extended period past an initial COVID infection, have been busy.

She doesn't have data on long COVID diagnoses in Dallas, and researchers don't always agree on a definition of the illness. But she said the best estimates are that about 10% of COVID infections are associated with long COVID.

Even people who are asymptomatic when infected by the coronavirus can get long COVID, Perl said, but people who are vaccinated are much less likely to develop the illness.

Scientists are still seeking to understand the long-term impacts of the virus.

"Many [doctors] tell me we need to be cautious of what are the long-term effects of COVID, because we're still learning," Love said.

## **Take steps to protect yourself**

As schools go back into session and the flu season approaches, Perl recommends taking extra precautions to protect against respiratory viruses.

"When you start seeing an increase in COVID, commonly you're also seeing an increase in other respiratory viruses," Perl said. "They kind of all work together."

Perl recommends keeping good hand hygiene, coughing and sneezing into your arm, encouraging kids to wash their hands and staying home if you have respiratory symptoms. If a child has a fever, they should stay home and not return to school until they've gone 24 hours without one, Perl said.

Huang recommends considering wearing a mask in crowded, indoor or poorly ventilated areas if you're at a high risk of getting sick from COVID-19.

Look out for symptoms of the virus, like a [sore throat](#), shortness of breath, cough, new loss of taste or smell, fatigue, runny nose or a slight fever. Get tested if you have symptoms, Huang said. If you get COVID-19, Huang recommends taking advantage of treatments that are available.

While COVID-19's presence in our lives looks different from four years ago, the summer uptick in cases is still a good reminder to practice healthy habits.

"With the COVID pandemic, we've really gotten a very important appreciation for the impact that respiratory viruses can have on human health," Perl said.

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