

COVID-19 Update Oct 23, 2020

Epidemiologists announced a huge weekly increase in new cases (366,400), a number not seen since early August, and expressed concern that record-breaking numbers could occur the first two weeks of November if spread is not controlled. The increase is driven by pandemic fatigue, with people returning to normal activities; return of young people to school; and more indoor transmission with cooler weather as people spend more time inside.

On Friday Oct. 17 the US saw 69,000 new COVID cases, the highest single day total since July.

On Wednesday Oct. 16, ten states had higher COVID cases reported. On Tuesday Oct. 20, that number had increased to 41 states, including SC, with 14 states reporting their highest hospitalization rates EVER.

Although cases have been rising in the US, deaths have not been increasing as much as might have been expected. This is believed to be due to better care for those who become critically ill, as well as more COVID cases in younger people, whose illness is usually less severe.

With cases rising alarmingly in France, President Macron announced a new 9 PM curfew for 18 million French citizens in 9 districts, including Paris.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced that the border will remain closed to the U.S. until COVID is better controlled in the U.S., and advised Canadian snow birds not to migrate to Florida this winter.

The administration announced Monday that all residents and employees of long term care facilities would receive free COVID-19 vaccines when they become available, through a partnership with CVS and Walgreens. (Side note from Donna: It will be MORE important to immunize employees, family and visitors than the residents, as the frail elderly do not produce antibody very well when vaccinated.)

More rapid tests have been made available and are being used, which is good news for contact tracing and quarantine purposes, but raises a question regarding statistics as those data are not reported to state labs. The US government is shipping 100 million Abbott rapid tests to public schools, long term care facilities, and other sites. Quidel and Becton Dickenson have shipped 35 million rapid tests since June. This means an estimated 750,000 to 950,000 test results per day nationally have not been resulted in the databases. HHS has purchased and shipped 14,000 rapid test instruments to nursing homes.

Medicare announced a \$25 pay cut per COVID test beginning Jan. 1 to labs with a turnaround time of more than two days, in an attempt to speed up test results reporting. However, since slow resulting is in part because many labs still cannot obtain the testing equipment, like swabs, test tubes and pipettes, this may actually decrease testing capability.

On Saturday Oct 17, officials broke up a party of an estimated 2,000 USC students at The Orchard apartment complex a mile from the USC campus. No citations or arrests were made but officials will be meeting with the managers of the complex, which is owned by College Town Properties.

On Tuesday AARP published data showing SC number one in the country in COVID deaths among nursing home residents (172 resident deaths total or 1.2 deaths/100 residents). The national average was 0.48 deaths/100 residents. SC ranked third in the nation in cases (823 cases which is 5.8 cases/100 residents.) The national average for cases was 2.6 cases/100 residents.

On Tuesday, New York Gov. Cuomo announced that targeted testing and strict isolation measures in coronavirus 'hot spots' was working well in New York and might allow restrictions for the general population to be eased in the near future.

On Wednesday, SC DHEC published that the percent positive on COVID tests was 13.4%, up from 10.6% two weeks before.

The UK announced plans for a human challenge COVID vaccine study to begin in January, in which young healthy volunteers will be intentionally infected with the coronavirus to test the efficacy of a vaccine. Numerous trials currently have shown their vaccine to be safe, but efficacy data requires proof that it works, which can take many months.

The CDC updated its 'close contact' definition from '15 minutes within 6 feet' to include multiple shorter periods of contact that add up to 15 minutes, after a prison guard became infected with COVID after multiple, short interactions.