

COVID Update March 26, 2021

As of Wednesday March 24, the U.S. is reporting a seven-day average of about 55,000 new cases per day, up 3% from the previous week. The country is also reporting about 4,600 new hospitalizations and nearly 1,000 deaths per day.

The U.S. has over 30 million confirmed coronavirus cases and more than 545,000 deaths, according to Johns Hopkins University data. Researchers at UCLA reported Friday that 627,000 total U.S. deaths are projected, and without the vaccines, that number would have reached 1.27 million. It was also estimated that the death toll would have remained under 300,000 if by last May the nation had adopted strict mask, distancing, and testing protocols. The average number of daily cases remains high at 58,303, despite decreases in some regions of the country. For SC, the number of new daily cases averaged 1,108. The number of new daily cases per 100K population dropped to 22, a 4% decrease, placing SC at 15th in the country in overall new case rate, an improvement from the previous week and excellent news considering that 33 states had increases in cases. In more good news, most of the state is now in the 'moderate' category of incidence in the two week cumulative rate of new cases per 100k population for the March 10 through March 23. Only 10 counties remain in the 'high' category of greater than 200 new cases per 100k population, but these include Greenville and Anderson counties. Overall in the upstate, we are at the 'moderate' level with 128 new cases per 100k.

In good news, the daily vaccination rate has now hit 3 million per day at times, averaging 2.51 million doses per day. On Thursday, it was announced that the goal of 100 million doses of vaccine administered in the first 100 days of the new administration was met on day 58, and the new goal of 200 million doses by day 100 has been set.

In SC, 1,264,061 individuals have received one dose of vaccine, which is 30.4% of the eligible population over age 16, and 24.6% of the entire population of 4.16 million now eligible. Of those who are eligible, 12.6% are now fully vaccinated. However, there is concern that many individuals are receiving their second vaccine when scheduled. There are 5.15 million people in SC so a little less than a million are not yet eligible for vaccine.

Some states have expanded vaccine eligibility to everyone over age 16 and others intend to do so in the near future.

Confusing reports were issued regarding the Astra Zeneca vaccine, which is under review by the FDA for emergency use authorization in the U.S. Several European countries paused its use when deaths due to blood clots following the vaccine were reported. However, analysis of the data showed that the incidence of blood clots was no greater following vaccination than in the general population. Astra Zeneca reported initially, using data that ended February 17, that the vaccine prevented 100% of severe illness, hospitalization and death, and 79% of symptomatic, mild illness. When analysts questioned that February 17 cut off date, and all cases in vaccinated individuals after that date were included, the prevention of severe COVID remained 100%, and the prevention of symptomatic, mild illness was 76%. So the vaccine appears to be very effective and very safe but bad press may adversely affect acceptance of that vaccine, at least initially.