

COVID Update May 14, 2021

Most of the state remains an 'moderate' level of new case activity, with 8 (Union, McCormick, Hampton Sumter, Clarendon, Dillon, Marion and Georgetown), now in the 'low' level, which is great news, and one (Oconee) still high. Case rates overall have trended very slowly downward every week except the one following Easter and spring break

On Tuesday, Gov. McMaster signed an executive order allowing parents to opt out of their children wearing masks in schools and prohibiting local governments from using the current state of emergency to justify their own mask mandates. It was also announced that schools with more than 5% of their students opting for virtual school would have funding cut, and that the use of vaccine passports would not be permitted in S.C. The City of Greenville then announced that their mask mandate, the first in the state, would no longer be enforced as the governor's executive order renders it invalid. This means the requirement for face coverings in retail establishments and personal care service providers has been lifted.

The U.S. has reported more than 32.7 million COVID-19 cases and 582,000 deaths, according to data from Johns Hopkins University. Worldwide, there have been more than 159 million cases and more than 3.3 million deaths. The US is now averaging about 600 deaths per day, down from about 3,000 in January. The decline in deaths is thought to be due to more than 75% of people over 65 now being vaccinated in the U.S.

Cases continue to drop nationally, and deaths are decreasing as well, averaging around 600 per day, which is the lowest level since July. In many states, including SC, daily deaths have dropped to single digits. Infections have dropped to 38,000 per day, the lowest since September, and a decrease of 85% since the peak in January, and 40% lower than just a month ago.

More than 58% of U.S. adults (46% of the total population) has received at least one shot, and nearly 45% of the country is fully vaccinated. But the pace of first-dose vaccinations has fallen 60% in just the last month,

The Pfizer vaccine is now available in SC for 12-15 year olds.

On Wednesday it was announced that the CDC had changed its recommendation that other vaccines be separated from the COVID vaccine by at least two weeks. Other vaccines can now be given at the same time as the COVID vaccine.

Thirteen more individuals have been identified who developed the thrombosis with thrombocytopenia ('clots with low platelets') syndrome after receiving the Johnson and Johnson vaccine, raising the total number to 28. No new cases have been found since the vaccine was paused, however. A total of three people have died and one remains in the ICU.

In India, where very few are vaccinated, the surge continues unabated. A triple mutation virus has also been identified there that is more transmissible and also appears to be resistant to the current vaccines. This has caused epidemiologists to ask world leaders to more vigorously encourage vaccinations, in an effort to 'get ahead' of the vaccine resistant variants we know are on the way. The rapid spread of COVID throughout Asia, continues. In fact, more people have been diagnosed in Asia over the past two weeks than in the Americas, Europe and Africa combined.

The CDC is under fire for being slow to develop new guidelines that take vaccination status into account. Those guidelines continue to recommend against removal of masks, even for those who are fully vaccinated, for any indoor gatherings. The hesitance to lift the mask requirement in the vaccinated is due at least in part to an absence of data on whether vaccination prevents mild disease with little to no symptoms but significant virus shedding and, therefore, ability to spread disease.