

## COVID Update 8/18/2021

Across the U.S., the Delta variant is causing a surge in hospitalizations and ICU admissions that is stressing many health care systems. The Delta variant now makes up 98.8% of all cases in the U.S., is more transmissible and is causing more severe illness, including 'breakthrough' cases in people who are vaccinated or previously had COVID.

Younger people are being hard hit by the Delta variant. In fact, hospitalizations in all age groups under 50 are now at an all time high in the U.S., surpassing the peak in January 2021.

In SC as of Monday August 9 the entire state is at a 'high' level of new cases in the two-week cumulative average per 100k population (greater than 200 new cases is considered high). Greenville County went from 349 as of August 13, to 695 as of August 18 (up from single digit numbers the first week in July). That average is 1,017 for Pickens, 785 for Oconee, and 753 for Spartanburg.

The state documented 3,367 new cases on August 3; 3,047 on August 13; and 2,487 on August 16, up from just 60 cases on June 20. Hopefully, that recent downward trend will continue. The percentage of tests positive is 19% as of Monday August 16 (a 5% or less rate is desirable), meaning a large number of cases are not being detected by testing.

Prisma Health reported an increase in hospitalized COVID patients from 12 patients on July 2, to 304 on August 12. In Spartanburg County, the Regional Health Care system is at capacity and as of Thursday August 12 had 99 COVID patients, up from 3 on July 1. The average age of the patients has also dropped from 68 to 55. At AnMed Health, the number of COVID patients increased from single digits in July to 58 on Aug 13, and 76 on Aug 17, with 20 in the ICU and 9 on ventilators.

Reported breakthrough cases in vaccinated individuals have risen in S.C. On July 9, it was reported that for the last two weeks in June, those not fully vaccinated made up 94% of new cases, 90% of hospitalizations, and 100% of deaths. On August 17 it was reported that for the month of July, those not fully vaccinated made up 88% of new cases, 77% of hospitalizations, and 79% of deaths. The decline in vaccine effectiveness could be due to waning immunity, the increase in the Delta variant, and/or lapses in precautions like mask wearing. The current vaccines continue to provide good protection but are not perfect, which reinforces the need for continued use of masks and distancing.

Pediatric ICU beds are full across the state, with children with COVID as well as RSV, which has made an earlier than usual appearance this year.

Pickens County schools, which were some of the first in the state to begin classes, closed to in person classes after just 9 days and went to all virtual classes temporarily, due to a COVID outbreak in which one student and 4 staff members were hospitalized, including 2 on ventilators.

Public officials have expressed disagreement with Gov. McMaster's ban on mask mandates in schools, including State Superintendent of Education Molly Spearman, DHEC Epidemiologist Dr. Linda Bell, and members of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Also a petition signed by over 1,000 medical doctors in the state was submitted to the Governor's Office on Monday asking that masks be made mandatory in schools. And 43 members of the SC House Democratic Caucus are also calling for an emergency session to repeal the proviso 1.108, related to mask requirements, from the state budget.

The State Supreme Court ruled Tuesday that higher education institutions CAN require masks, contrary to Gov. McMaster and the State Attorney General Alan Wilson's opinion, and Clemson and USC announced Tuesday evening that masks will be required in classrooms and on campus.

The Biden Administration announced plans on Wednesday Aug 18 to begin offering a 'booster' third shot of the Moderna or Pfizer vaccine to individuals who received their second dose 8 months previously. Initially, the same at risk groups will be targeted that received the earliest vaccines, including elderly nursing home residents and other seniors, and health care workers.