

COVID Update October 6, 2021

COVID case numbers continue to decrease gradually, in SC as well as the US. In SC, we are now averaging a little over 1,000 cases daily, down 14% in the past week. In the US cases are down 23% over the past week. Nationwide, new cases are down by 35% overall in the past month, and worldwide have declined by a third.

In Greenville County, incidence remains high but is down to 204 cases per 100k population over two weeks (greater than 200 is a high incidence), which is markedly less than over 1,000 two weeks ago. The entire state remains at high level.

On Oct. 1, the CDC issued a new guidance for upcoming holiday celebrations, recommending virtual options when possible, and reminding the public that while outdoor settings are generally safer and can be experienced without wearing a mask, a mask should be worn if it will be a crowded outdoor setting in an area of high COVID cases. The webpage with the guidance is <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/holidays/celebrations.html>

On Friday, the U.S. surpassed 700,000 COVID deaths, continuing to average over 1,900 deaths daily.

As of Tuesday October 5, the coronavirus has killed 702,000 people and over 43,667,000 cases are confirmed.

It was announced on Monday that data on the Delta variant cases suggests that a higher level of herd immunity (90-95%) will be necessary to prevent its spread, compared to 65-70% for the original variant that surged in the winter. It is clear that vaccination confers better immunity than the disease does, but even vaccination immunity wanes over time so boosters will in all likelihood be needed for all. Presently 65.4% of Americans over age 12 are now fully vaccinated, which is 56% of the total population. Last week over 893,000 doses were administered in the US daily, a 43% increase from the week before. Many of those were booster doses.

The FDA announced on Friday that its advisory committee would meet Oct. 26 to review initial data from Pfizer on use of its vaccine in the 5 to 11 age group. And on Monday it was announced that Johnson and Johnson would seek FDA approval for a booster of its one dose vaccine, which has been shown to confer somewhat less effective, and more rapidly waning, immunity than the two dose Pfizer and Moderna shots. The FDA advisory committee will review that data on October 15. It is notable that both these FDA advisory meetings are occurring BEFORE the companies actually submit their applications for emergency use authorization, reflecting the urgency of the Biden administration's efforts to provide more protection against COVID to the population.

On Friday, Merck and Ridgeback Biotherapeutics announced they had created an antiviral pill that can reduce Covid-19 hospitalization and death by 50%, according to their data. Merck said it would seek emergency use authorization from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the medication molnupiravir as soon as possible. If approved, it would become the first oral medicine that fights Covid-19.

Alaska this week announced statewide emergency plans for prioritizing hospital and ER admissions, and EMS transports, essentially rationing care to prevent overflow at hospitals.

The Greenville County School Board voted this week to not implement a mask mandate, resulting in protests from parents on both sides of the masking issue.

On Tuesday the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals rejected Gov. Henry McMaster and State Attorney General Alan Wilson's challenge to a federal ruling that gave school districts the ability to require masks, stating that McMaster and Wilson failed to comply with the rules of the appeals process. They needed to first seek a stay on the ruling in a district court before coming to the circuit court of appeals. Defendants can bypass the district court and seek a stay or relief in a circuit court if they can show "specific reasons" that a fair ruling is out of question in the lower court. McMaster's office immediately sent a letter explaining why they bypassed the lower appeals court. The district court will now consider whether McMaster's appeal stands.

On Monday it was reported that the week of September 24, Spartanburg County had the highest hospitalization rate for COVID-19 in the entire US.