

Statesman

Texas breaks previous daily record with nearly 7,000 new coronavirus cases

By **Nicole Cobler**

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State health officials reported nearly 7,000 new cases of COVID-19 and more than 6,000 hospitalizations Tuesday, unprecedented figures that came as Gov. Greg Abbott suspended elective surgeries at hospitals in four South Texas counties.

The Texas Department of State Health Services reported 6,975 new coronavirus cases Tuesday, up from Thursday's record of 5,996 cases. Texas hospitals had 6,533 new lab-confirmed COVID-19 patients, up from Monday's record of 5,913.

State health officials also reported 21 new coronavirus-related fatalities Tuesday, bringing the death toll of the virus in the state to 2,424.

State and local officials are racing to rein in those numbers. Abbott shifted his tone last week after weeks of gradually reopening sectors of the economy. He warned of a "massive outbreak" last week, days before closing Texas bars and reducing restaurant dining room capacity.

In a series of local TV interviews Tuesday evening, Abbott said he couldn't predict when the state could reverse its latest restrictions.

"We hope to open them up as soon as possible," Abbott said. "Right now, it's hard to predict," he said, because new cases and hospitalizations are increasing at a rapid pace each day.

The statewide record numbers were announced hours after Abbott halted elective surgeries in Cameron, Hidalgo, Nueces and Webb counties — home counties to Brownsville, McAllen, Corpus Christi and Laredo — as coronavirus hospitalizations and cases in those areas rise.

Abbott made a similar move less than a week ago, when he paused elective surgeries in the state's most populated counties — Travis, Bexar, Dallas and Harris — to free up beds for coronavirus patients.

"As these counties experience a surge in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations, we are committed to working alongside hospitals to help ensure that every COVID-19 patient who needs a bed will have access to one," Abbott said in a statement. "We are constantly monitoring the data at the local level and will continue to take precautionary action where it is necessary."

Nueces County cases have more than tripled since last Monday, surging from 633 to 1,915. Hidalgo County cases nearly doubled over the same time period, while Cameron County cases increased by 41% and Webb County cases by 56%.

In those same areas, state health officials reported dwindling ICU beds as cases rise. The trauma service region that includes Nueces and 11 other counties has just nine available ICU beds, according to data from the Texas Department of State Health Services. Nearly 110 lab-confirmed COVID-19 patients are hospitalized in the area.

Statewide hospitalizations have climbed since Memorial Day after two months of relatively low and steady numbers through April and May.

Sunday marked the end of a 16-day streak for record numbers of patients in Texas hospitals. The state surpassed 5,000 hospitalized coronavirus patients for the first time Friday, four days before surpassing 6,000 for the first time Tuesday.

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Just 1,511 hospitalizations were reported on Memorial Day.

The number of people confirmed to have the disease also skyrocketed in June, with new COVID-19 cases more than doubling since May.

The increase in COVID-19 hospitalizations and cases this month led the Texas Medical Association on Tuesday to call on the Republican Party of Texas to cancel its in-person state convention scheduled for July in Houston.

“This is just not the time to bring thousands of the party faithful from around the state to an indoor meeting in a county that, as I wrote, reports more than 18,000 active COVID-19 cases,” Dr. Diana Fite, president of the association, wrote in a letter to state GOP leadership. “While much of our state has so far been spared the brunt of the coronavirus attack, our metropolitan areas in general — and Houston in particular — are now among the national epicenters of current COVID-19 outbreaks.”

Texas Republican Party Chairman James Dickey has maintained that the event can be held in-person with proper social distancing guidelines and respect for face masks, although they won’t be mandated. The Texas Democratic Party held a virtual convention earlier this month.

On Tuesday, Dickey said he would take all recommendations “very seriously.”