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Covid-19: US cases soar as Trump pushes for schools to open

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Covid-19 cases surged in Arizona, California, Florida, and Texas, and at least 33 other states have seen cases increase by at least 10% in the past week.¹ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported a record 64 771 new cases on 9 July.²

President Donald Trump demanded that schools fully reopen and said that guidelines from the CDC were expensive and impractical.

Trump is eager to reopen schools for America's 56 million schoolchildren, making it easier for their parents to go back to work as he pushes to get the economy moving. Many of the children have been at home since lockdown in March and depending on internet classes and parental help. He threatened to withhold federal funds from schools that do not return to in-person classes in the fall. However, most school funding comes from individual states and cities.

In late May, Trump urged states to end lockdown and reopen their economies. Many states did, ignoring warnings from public health authorities that it was too soon. Many of those states, especially Arizona, Florida, and Texas, are now seeing an increase in cases and are pausing or reinstituting precautions. Texas governor Greg Abbott, for example, last week required mask wearing in most of the state.

The US has 3 112 540 cases at the end of 9 July—almost certainly an undercount. That is about a quarter of worldwide cases.³

On 8 July, Arizona reported 3520 new cases and California reported 8548. On 9 July, Florida reported 8935 new cases and Texas reported 9979. These four states make up about half of all new cases in the US. All but California reopened early. The surge in cases is thought to be related to people congregating in bars and other social venues.

"If the goal is to have schools open in the fall, we should not have bars open in the summer," said Leana Wen, former Baltimore health commissioner and a professor at George Washington University.¹

The CDC's guidelines for reopening schools include keeping children 2 m apart; keeping children separated on school buses; closing school common areas such as playgrounds, lunchrooms, and auditoriums; improving ventilation systems; having children bring their own meals and eating at their desks (difficult because many children in poor areas depend on school meals); wearing masks; placing barriers between sinks in school bathrooms; and encouraging frequent handwashing.⁴

Trump demanded the CDC come up with less stringent guidelines. Robert Redfield, CDC director, refused, but Vice President Mike Pence said that the CDC would offer new documents that were not as "tough."⁵

As covid-19 cases increase, parents and teachers are concerned about the safety of in-person schooling. Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, said, "We can't reopen the economy without reopening schools, and we can't reopen schools without the resources to do so safely."⁵

1 Sanchez R. Americans made "tremendous sacrifices." The great reopening of the pandemic summer still got derailed. *CNN*. June 2020. www.cnn.com/2020/07/09/us/us-coronavirus-summer-reopening/index.html.

2 Reuters. US CDC reports 3 047 671 coronavirus cases. *New York Times*. 9 July 2020. www.nytimes.com/reuters/2020/07/09/us/09reuters-health-coronavirus-usa-cdc.html.

3 Covid-19 dashboard by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering at Johns Hopkins University. <https://gisanddata.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6>.

4 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Coronavirus disease 2019: considerations for schools. 19 May 2020. www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/schools.html.

5 Wilkie C. Trump threatens to cut funding for schools, slams CDC reopening guidelines as too tough and expensive. 8 July 2020. www.cnbc.com/2020/07/08/coronavirus-trump-threatens-to-cut-school-funding-slams-cdc-reopening-guidelines.html.