

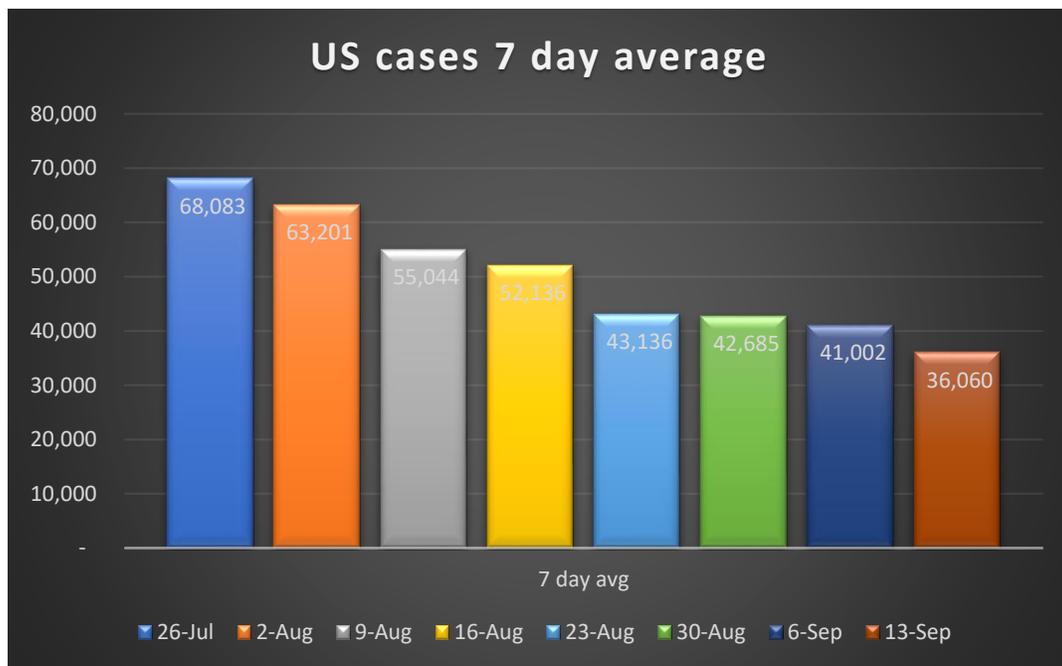
PCS Information Bulletin #34: COVID-19 Review

Wednesday, September 16, 2020

As always, please remember that **this report is for informational purposes only** and does not constitute the designation of a PCS event. We have decided to provide this report simply to help the market understand the COVID-19 situation and to provide access to some of the resources our team uses daily for intelligence on this event.

Fall surge in COVID-19 cases amid school re-opening

While cases on the European side spiked, with France, Spain and UK taking measures against summer vacationers returning home, the situation in the US seemed to have stabilized a bit. National active case numbers have been trending downward at a slow pace for several weeks, however new signs show that this trend will not continue.



Beginning of fall and return to school means we could see a dramatic spike in cases at schools and universities in remote areas, that have been considered low impact until now. Places that allowed students to return for in-person classes are dealing with spikes from low digit cases at the beginning of the week, to hundreds by the end of the week.

US colleges and universities have recorded more than 36,000 additional coronavirus cases last week, bringing the total of campus infections to 88,000 since the pandemic began. This dramatic increase in the number of cases comes as a result of increased testing and various measures implemented to safeguard the students. Schools have invested in health measures to bring back at least some students and provide some sense of normalcy, however this backfired rapidly.

The State University of New York at Oneonta sent students home after the coronavirus spun out of control on campus in less than two weeks, with more than 500 cases. Over the past week, case counts continued to grow rapidly at University of Nebraska-Lincoln and nearly doubled at the University of Missouri in Columbia, which added more than 540 cases alone. At California State University Chico, which allowed only a small fraction of students to return to campus, cases rose by more than 60 percent. The University of Alabama has started randomly testing 3 percent of the campus population weekly to try to stay ahead of the spread.

A lot of schools have postponed the opening game of its football season and all the other measures implemented are in hopes of containing the infection spread before the Thanksgiving vacation, when students are scheduled to travel home. Despite all that was done, colleges and universities have now become the hot spots for virus transmission in the US.

Upcoming elections – a potential cause of COVID-19 cases spike

As we look ahead and consider the upcoming November elections, outbreaks in highly populated areas could bring pressure and affect turnout if voters plan to cast ballots in person. Some potential risks associated with voting in person would be waiting in long lines, using communal pens, touching the same voting machines or handing out materials and ballots.

Recent reports indicate higher pay in some areas for November election poll workers which raises concerns that this measure would attract elderly people who may be at a higher risk for contracting COVID-19. The average age of poll workers in some cities like Philadelphia is 60. So, despite initially refusing the job, the recent increase in poll worker pay is too much for some to turn down – \$250 for a day's work is a lot of money for families in need.

Another consequence could also be the increased transmission risk from campaign supporters or even candidate's accompanying staff. Even candidates themselves risk a higher exposure threat as they are campaigning, and large gatherings of crowds grow bigger and bigger closer to November. The traditional speaking rallies and increased travel to support candidates could potentially constitute a moving spike zone that spreads the disease along its path.

Young adults in the U.S. moving back in with their parents

The coronavirus outbreak has pushed millions of Americans, especially young adults, to move in with family members. The share of 18- to 29-year-olds living with their parents has become a majority since U.S. coronavirus cases began spreading early this year. In July, 52% of young adults resided with one or both of their parents, up from 47% in February, according to a new Pew Research Center analysis of monthly Census Bureau data.

Young adults have been particularly hard hit by this year's pandemic and economic downturn and have been more likely to move than other age groups, according to analysis. About one-in-ten young adults (9 percent) say they relocated temporarily or permanently due to the coronavirus outbreak, and about the same share (10 percent) had somebody move into their household. Among all adults who moved due to

the pandemic, 23 percent said the most important reason was because their college campus had closed, and 18 percent said it was due to job loss or other financial reasons.

These new living arrangements may have an impact not just on young adults and their families, but on the U.S. economy overall, reflecting the importance of the housing market to overall economic growth. Slower household growth could mean less demand for housing and household goods. There also may be a decline in the number of renters and homeowners, and in overall housing activity. Between February and July 2020, the number of households headed by an 18- to 29-year-old declined by 1.9 million, or 12 percent.

Western U.S. Wildfires and COVID-19

2020 is continuing to be an unprecedented year for cat activity. In over 70 years of PCS tracking and designating catastrophic events, never has there been a year with ten separate wildfire events warranting a PCS designation. And to make matters worse, all ten fires are ongoing at the same time. California, Oregon and Washington have been ravaged over the past several weeks from massive fires. The previous record for PCS wildfire events in one year was six back in 2017. Since the first PCS wildfire event was designated in 1964, PCS has issued 49 wildfire catastrophe designations. Since 2017, 22 wildfires have received PCS designations thus in three years accounting for nearly 45% of all of the PCS historical wildfire events.

The fires in California, Oregon and Washington state have caused multiple fatalities and has left dozens missing. In the three states, 6,300 are already in emergency Red Cross shelters and hotels and as many as 50,000 more could be before the blazes are under control according to the American Red Cross.

Normally, evacuees would be gathering in school gymnasiums and meeting halls, sleeping on cots and eating at buffet lines, all provided by organizations like the Red Cross, Salvation Army and other faith and community groups. However, because COVID-19 is airborne and easily spread in close quarters, gathering places are potential hotbeds of transmission causing disaster assistance groups to take a different approach.

The Red Cross is trying to prevent the virus from spreading at shelters by regularly testing staffers, cleaning and disinfecting often, requiring masks and screening evacuees for signs of illness. Those who are sick or have symptoms are sent to special isolation shelters and kept away from one another. When possible, displaced residents are sent to hotels instead of group shelters. Instead of buffet lines, box lunches are delivered. In group shelters, staffers are using plastic pipes strung with clear shower curtains to separate evacuees but allow them to see out from their own socially distanced areas.

The Oregon Health Authority has recently confirmed the pandemic's toll in Oregon has exceed 500 deaths. Oregon Governor Kate Brown emphasized the importance of continuing to follow COVID-19 guidelines, even as Oregonians responded to wildfires in many communities and a heavy blanket of smoke across much of the state. Group shelters are set up at churches, colleges and community buildings, while malls, golf courses and other businesses opened parking for evacuees who can stay in recreational vehicles. It will likely be weeks before officials know if the evacuations contributed to the virus spreading, and even then, it may be difficult to tell as families scatter to new locations.

At the Oregon State Fairgrounds in the capital of Salem, groups of unmasked evacuees gathered in parking lots. Volunteers wearing disposable masks walked from group to group, taking down their information and asking what they needed for the days ahead. Signs were posted on the doors of the exposition center, where cots were set up, with safety guidelines for both wildfires and the pandemic. Inside, nearly everyone wore masks, likely because volunteers positioned at the door reminded them to do so.

In California, Cal Fire recommended asking friends or relatives in advance whether friends or family can stay with them if the need arose. Cal Fire also provided guidance to check with relatives about whether they have symptoms of COVID-19 or have people in their home at higher risk for serious illness and if so for them to make other arrangements.

The risk of exposure to COVID-19 is just one of the concerns for people fleeing wildfires, wildfire smoke and heat have faced. COVID-19 has created a "perfect storm" of risk for certain groups of people with underlying health problems. The microscopic particles in wildfire smoke can irritate the tissue deep in the lungs and cause inflammation and infections. The effects of wildfire smoke may make people more susceptible to COVID-19 and worsen their symptoms.

Getting health care has also become harder during these natural disasters. Hospitals have seen an influx of injuries. Wildfires have blocked access to some critical health care facilities, damaged the buildings, cut power to homes and care facilities and has caused the shutdown pandemic testing locations.

Some researchers have also explored the potential for an evacuation spreading COVID-19. In a recent study of evacuation patterns and COVID-19 cases in Florida, researchers at the Union of Concerned Scientists estimated that if a Category 3 hurricane hit Southeast Florida, the difference in that region between evacuees taking shelter in communities with low coronavirus transmission rates versus those with high rates could be as high as 50,000 new COVID-19 cases.

Lessons may be learned from Louisiana and Texas as well. Both had high rates of COVID-19 when hurricanes hit in late August. Louisiana used its "Megashelter," a facility spanning more than 200,000 square feet (18,580 square meters) that's designed to hold nearly 4,000 evacuees, for those with special medical needs during Hurricane Laura. Others got help finding hotel rooms and vouchers to cover the cost. Louisiana health officials are now offering evacuees mobile COVID-19 testing. Hurricane Sally is the latest NatCat event that will stress an already over-burdened system.