

## **State breaks record for virus hospitalizations**

**Mike Schneider**

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ORLANDO ? A day after it recorded the most new daily cases since the start of the pandemic, Florida on Sunday broke a previous record for current hospitalizations, as the number of patients in hospitals because of COVID-19 once again broke through the 10,000-person threshold.

The Sunshine State had 10,207 people hospitalized with confirmed COVID-19 cases, according to data reported to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.

The previous record was from more than a year ago, July 23, 2020, more than a half-year before vaccinations started becoming widespread, when Florida had 10,170 hospitalizations, according to the Florida Hospital Association.

Florida is now leading the nation in per-capita hospitalizations for COVID-19, as hospitals around the state report having to put emergency room visitors in beds in hallways and others document a noticeable drop in the age of patients.

In the past week, Florida has averaged 1,525 adult hospitalizations a day, and 35 daily pediatric hospitalizations. Both are the highest per-capita rate in the nation, according to Jason Salemi, an associate professor of epidemiology at the University of South Florida.

The hospitalizations and increasing cases have come as the new, more transmittable delta variant has spread throughout Florida, and residents have returned to pre-pandemic activities.

"The recent rise is both striking and not-at-all surprising," Salemi said in an email late Saturday.

Federal health data released Saturday showed that Florida reported 21,683 new cases of COVID-19, the state's highest one-day total since the start of the pandemic. The latest numbers were recorded on Friday and released on Saturday on the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website.

The figures show how quickly the number of cases is rising in the Sunshine State: only a day earlier, Florida reported 17,093 new daily cases.

Republican Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has resisted mandatory mask mandates and vaccine requirements, and along with the state Legislature, has limited local officials' ability to impose restrictions meant to stop the spread of COVID-19.

DeSantis on Friday barred school districts from requiring students to wear masks when classes resume this month.

Throughout Florida, from Jacksonville to Miami to Tampa, hospitals have become overwhelmed.

Barry Burton, the Pinellas County administrator, told the Tampa Bay Times that some local hospitals are already having to divert ambulances to different locations because of capacity concerns.

There has been a startling rise in the number of children with the virus at hospitals in Miami, many of them requiring intensive care.

Memorial Health's Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital in Hollywood had seven patients with COVID-19. At Nicklaus Children's Hospital in Miami, there were 17 patients with COVID-19 on Friday, including six in the ICU and one who needed a ventilator, Dr. Marcos Mestre, vice president and chief medical officer, told the Miami Herald.

About half of the patients were under 12, Mestre said, and the rest were older and eligible for the vaccine. But none of the patients with COVID-19 at Nicklaus Children's on Friday were vaccinated. Most children who get COVID-19 do not need hospitalization, Mestre said.

MARTA LAVANDIER/AP