

COVID hospitalizations on the rise as U.S. enters Labor Day weekend

The U.S. is seeing a significant rise in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations as it enters Labor Day weekend.

According to the latest data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there were 15,067 new COVID patient hospitalizations for the week ending Aug. 19. That marked an 18.8% jump from the week before, and a staggering 86.9% increase over the past month. However, that is still down almost 61% compared to the same time last year.

New COVID hospital admissions have increased for seven straight weeks and are expected to continue rising. The CDC said it expects anywhere from 1,700 to 9,700 daily COVID admissions by the end of September.

Los Angeles County has seen cases double in the last month, according to data from the L.A. County Department of Public Health, with nursing homes particularly affected.

"There have only been a few times in the past year and a half when we saw this many new outbreaks in skilled nursing facilities," L.A. County Public Health Director Barbara Ferrer said Thursday. "And these were during the previous summer and winter surges."

In New Jersey, about one in four nursing homes are reporting an outbreak, according to the New Jersey Department of Health.

Retailers and pharmacies are seeing increased demand for in-person and at-home COVID testing. Walgreens told CBS News in a statement Friday that it was "seeing greater demand in this category nationwide, which may cause temporary and isolated shortages."

CVS told CBS News in its own statement that it was seeing a "slight uptick in requests for point-of-care COVID-19 testing at our pharmacies and clinics, and in purchases of at-home COVID-19 test kits." CVS noted, however, that it has "ample supply to meet our customers' and patients' testing needs both in-store, in-clinic and at CVS.com."

Contributing to the spread are three new COVID variants — EG.5, FL.1.5.1 and BA.2.86. The CDC estimated Friday that EG.5 is making up 21.5% of all new cases, while FL.1.5.1 is making up 14.5% of new infections and BA.2.86 makes up less than 1%.

Dr. William Schaffner, who specializes in infectious diseases at Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville, told CBS News there is cause for concern.

"I think we ought to take note of it because there has been some spillover into hospitalizations," Schaffner said.

Some hospital systems and medical facilities have reinstated mask mandates, including United Health Services and Upstate Medical Hospitals in New York, Kaiser Permanente Santa Rosa Medical Center in Northern California and UMass Memorial Health in Massachusetts.

"People who are older, who have underlying chronic medical conditions, who are immune compromised, and who are pregnant — we ought to get those masks out again, to protect ourselves," Schaffner said.

The CDC has said a new COVID booster is expected to be available to the public by the end of September.

"This is a nasty, sneaky virus," Schaffner said. "Your protection will over time diminish. So even if you've had COVID in the past, once this new booster becomes available, you should get it."