

COVID-19 cases in Arizona hit 16-week low

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<https://azbigmedia.com/business/covid-19-cases-in-arizona-hit-16-week-low/>



Confirmed [COVID-19 cases](#) in Arizona reached 201,835 on Monday, August 31, an increase of just 174 from the previous day, according to the [Arizona Department of Health Services](#). The 174 new cases are the lowest the state has recorded since May 10, a span of more than 16 weeks.

It marks the 18th straight day that the number of new COVID-19 cases in Arizona was less than 1,000, which the state had not experienced since June. While July saw an average increase of 3,075 new cases a day,

Arizona averaged far less than one-third of that in August — an average of 877 new cases a day.

The number of deaths attributed to COVID-19 stands at 5,029 in Arizona. Rates of infection and death are down sharply from just a month ago and hospital bed availability has improved, which experts attribute to tighter restrictions on congregating and mask-wearing, among other changes.

But health experts all warn that now is not the time to relax.

“Just because the numbers are better, does not mean we can relax on the efforts that we’ve been putting forward,” said Holly Ward, spokeswoman for the AZ Hospital & Healthcare Association.

Challenges to those practices could come soon, as improving infection rates have put eight of the state’s [15 counties](#) in the “[moderate](#)” range for transmission and one in the “minimal” range — thresholds that let bars and restaurants start reopening.

Schools around the state are also finishing their second week of in-person classes for some students and teachers.

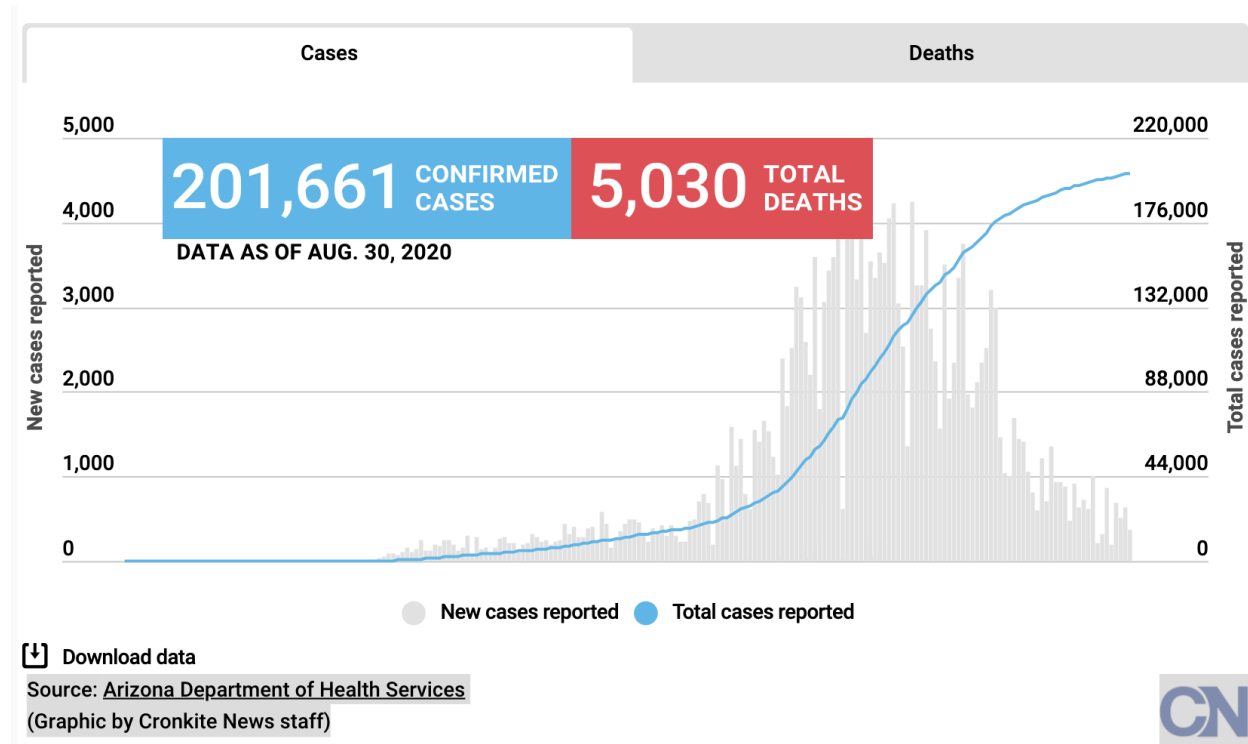
That has some health experts warning that state businesses and residents need to guard against easing up too much, too soon. A sudden easing of restrictions in May led to a spike in cases that made Arizona a national hot spot for COVID-19 infections.

“I think we’ve gone through several experiences now where we’ve let up on some of these things and opened a bit too quickly,” said Dr. Daniel Derksen, director of the University of Arizona Center for Rural Health. “People got relaxed and less careful about going to places like bars, the public congregating in large gatherings, or even large numbers of people not wearing masks.

“We have to continue to tend to the public health measures you see on the commercials and billboards, social distancing, wearing a mask, and being careful if you don’t have to be going out to a place where you’re exposed to the COVID-19 virus,” Derksen said.

COVID-19 in Arizona, by the numbers

Federal officials have recommended states wait to see 14 days of declines in these numbers before reopening schools and businesses. After Arizona's first reported case of COVID-19 on Jan. 26, a second case was not found in the state until March 3. The first death related to the disease was reported on March 20.



That appears to have worked. The Arizona Department of Health Services reported that new infections fell from 386 cases per 100,000 residents for the week of June 28 to 64 cases per 100,000 people for the week of Aug. 9. The department also reported that deaths, hospitalizations and the percent of positive tests all fell during the same period.

“The numbers within the Arizona hospitals are improving,” Ward said. “We’re seeing our ICU bed usage, specifically for COVID patients down dramatically, and that’s a great thing.”

As of Thursday, 20% of intensive-care unit beds were available for use, according to state data. About 18% of those beds were being used by COVID-19 patients and 62% were being used by other patients. At one point in July, COVID-19 patients occupied 57% of ICU beds.

“Those numbers were in the 40% range back in June,” Ward said. “To give perspective, now that we’re down in ICU beds used for COVID patients, that’s a fantastic drop.”

COVID-19 numbers have improved enough that three states – New York, New Jersey and Connecticut – removed Arizona from the list of states whose residents have to quarantine.

Ward and others attributed the state’s ability to “flatten the curve” of infection rates to following Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines, including social distancing, wearing face-coverings, and monitoring symptoms.

“Most definitely social distancing that has been implemented in serious form, many more people are wearing masks,” Ward said. “As soon as cities and towns had the authority to do so, they

implemented mask mandates and the pause in large social gatherings or events – all of those things have contributed. Along with every single individual’s effort to try to slow the spread.”

Will Humble, executive director of the Arizona Public Health Association, said “one of the biggest reasons” for slowdown in infection rates was when local officials began mandating those rules.

“The governor finally allowed local jurisdictions to put in place face-covering ordinances, which have actually been really successful,” Humble said. “On June 24, the governor closed bars and nightclubs and that, together with the face-covering requirement, are the two biggest reasons why we’ve seen a decline in the number of new cases here in Arizona.”

The decrease means more parts of the state **met benchmarks** that let them enter the “moderate” transmission zone that allows some reopening, with Maricopa and Pima counties meeting the benchmarks Thursday. That means bars and nightclubs that serve food can open at 50% of capacity if unrelated customers stay 6 feet apart and employees are masked, among **other requirements**.

Humble worries about the dangers reopened businesses and schools could present if people do not take the restrictions seriously enough. He said that if the state hopes to continue mitigating the spread of the virus, it will be important to continue observing social distancing and following CDC guidelines – now more than ever.

“The people that will suffer first are those kids and parents that would like to be in school learning in-person this fall,” he said. “But if compliance is good, if it works, then I think there’s a chance that cases could level off. The key is going to be enforcement.”

Derksen called the total number of infections and deaths an “unfortunate milestone,” but added that “on the better side ... we’ve seemed to have flattened that curve.”

Enforcement and continuing mitigation efforts will also be important as the state heads into its typical flu season, Derksen said.

“There are still areas that are of some concern, but it looks like the public health measures that have been put into place by the Arizona Department of Health Services and the governor’s office, towns and municipalities, are helping us along much better than the rise we saw in the summer,” Derksen said. “There’s still an awful lot of COVID-19 virus in the community. But we are getting better.”


COVID-19 is a serious disease that can be fatal in anyone, especially our elderly population and people with underlying health conditions. ADHS advises everyone to take precautions:

The best ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19:

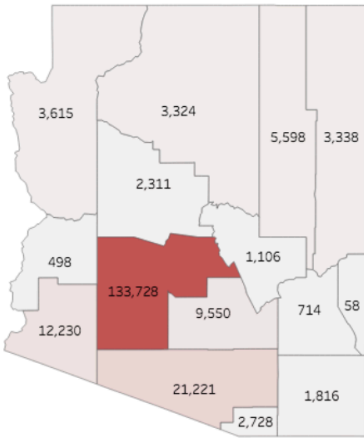
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Wear a mask when you are in close proximity to other people.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then immediately throw the tissue in the trash.
- **Clean and disinfect** frequently touched objects and surfaces.

Demographics

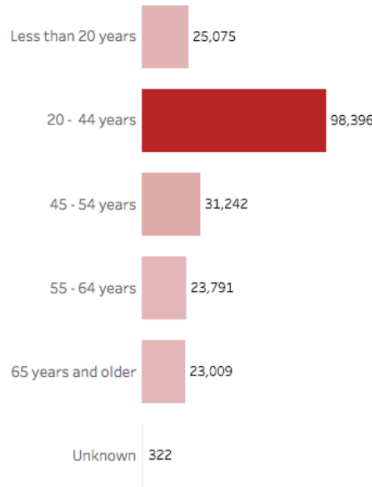
Number of Cases
201,835

Hover over the icon to get more information on the data in this dashboard. 

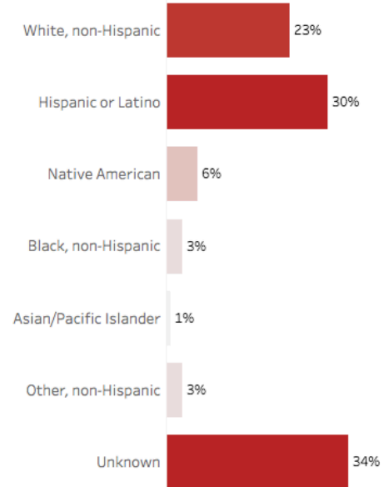
Select a county to filter the other graphs.
Graphs will not be displayed for counties with fewer than 10 cases.



COVID-19 Cases by Age Group



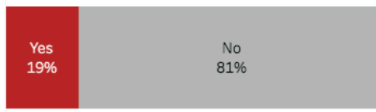
COVID-19 Cases by Race/Ethnicity



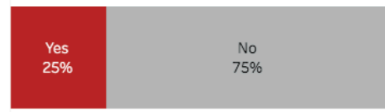
COVID-19 Cases by Gender



Chronic medical condition



High-risk
(65+ years OR 1+ chronic medical condition)



Date updated: 8/31/2020

Chronic medical conditions include diabetes, cardiac disease, hypertension, chronic pulmonary disease, chronic kidney disease, or chronic liver disease.

Farah Eltohamy of Cronkite News contributed to this report.