

CORONAVIRUS IN TEXAS

Dozens of Texas hospitals are out of ICU beds as COVID-19 cases again overwhelm the state's capacity

"This surge is by far the fastest and most aggressive that we've seen," said the health authority for Austin and Travis County, who urged eligible Texans to get vaccinated.

BY REESE OXNER AUG. 10, 2021 4 AM CENTRAL



The emergency room at Goodall-Hitcher Hospital in Clifton on Aug. 3, 2021. Texas hospitals say empty hospital beds are becoming a rare sight as COVID-19 hospitalizations surge. [Jordan Vanderhaar for The Texas Tribune](#)

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Dozens of Texas hospitals have run out of intensive care unit beds as COVID-19 surges faster than any other time during the pandemic, propelled by the new delta variant.

The state is divided into 22 trauma service areas, and half of them reported 10 or fewer available ICU beds on Sunday. As more than 9,400 COVID-19 patients fill the state's ICUs, which are reserved for the patients who are the sickest or most injured, the trauma service area that includes Laredo reported no available ICU beds, while the area that includes Abilene reported having one.

At least 53 Texas hospitals have no available ICU capacity, according to numbers reported to the federal government during the week ending Aug. 5. In Austin, five hospitals were at or above 90% of their ICU capacity during the same period, with two reporting no available ICU beds.

Here's how many Texas hospitals have run out of ICU beds

During the week ending on Aug. 12, 75 Texas hospitals reported that their ICU beds were filled to capacity. Every week, the federal government releases the ICU capacity data reported by about 200 Texas hospitals with more than four ICU patients or four staffed ICU beds.



Note: Because data for hospitals with fewer than four patients or fewer than four staffed ICU adult beds is redacted, we cannot calculate the percentage of staffed ICU beds. About 200 out of the more than 400 Texas hospitals that reported data to the federal government have fewer than four staffed adult ICU beds at any given time. Source: Department of Health & Human Services. Credit: Carla Astudillo

"This surge is by far the fastest and most aggressive that we've seen. Almost all of our hospitalizations are due to unvaccinated patients developing severe illness," Dr. Desmar Walkes, Austin-Travis County's health authority, told reporters last week. "ICU staff are seeing a younger population in our hospitals. Patients in the ICU are sicker and stay in the hospital longer than with prior surges, putting more strain on hospital resources."

Around 87.1% of all hospital beds in Texas are in use — the highest level since the start of the pandemic — with 14.1% of those beds occupied by COVID-19 patients. When Gov. Greg Abbott began to relax some COVID-19 restrictions on businesses in October, his order maintained reduced restaurant capacity and kept bars closed in regions in which 15% or more of hospital beds were filled with COVID-19 patients.

Hospital beds in use in Texas

The percentage of hospital beds in use across the state shows how the virus is currently impacting hospitals.



Source: Texas Department of State Health Services. Credit: The Texas Tribune

This week, COVID-19 hospitalizations reached higher levels across the state than when Abbott imposed a statewide mask mandate in July 2020. Abbott has maintained that he will not be reviving the mask mandate and has barred local authorities from issuing their own.

"Governor Abbott has been clear that we must rely on personal responsibility, not government mandates," Abbott press secretary Renae Eze said in a statement on Monday. "Every Texan has a right to choose for themselves and their children whether they will wear masks, open their businesses, or get vaccinated."

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Medical professionals are afraid that hospitals will become so overwhelmed by COVID-19 patients that they won't have space for new patients — a situation that many hospitals faced during previous COVID surges.

"We need to make sure that there's beds and hospitals and staff in hospitals available to take care of people who don't just have COVID-19, but ... all of those other conditions," said Dr. Jennifer Shuford, chief state epidemiologist for the Texas Department of State Health Services. "As we see hospitalizations increasing at this rapid rate, we are afraid that we're going to stress hospitals to the point that they can't take care of some of those other people who are coming in to the hospital for a stroke or a heart attack or any number of other things."

Already, Shuford said she's heard of hospitals that can't accept patient transfers from other hospitals because they have no beds open.

Dr. David Callender, president and CEO of Memorial Hermann Health System, a 17-hospital system spanning southeast Texas, said the "onslaught" of people hospitalized with COVID-19 during the recent surge could overwhelm its capacity if the current trend continues.

The system now has more than 800 people hospitalized with COVID-19, with nearly a third of its ICU beds occupied by COVID-19 patients, he said. At times, he said hospitals have had no pediatric ICU beds available and had to transport young patients across the state or even out of the state.

"Everybody who's unvaccinated needs to get a vaccine," he said. "That's what will keep us out of those terrible situations where people need care in a hospital and they can't get it."

See the capacity of Texas hospital ICUs the week ending Aug. 12

During the week ending on Aug. 12, 75 Texas hospitals reported that their ICU beds were filled to capacity. Every week, the federal government releases the ICU capacity data reported by about 200 Texas hospitals with more than four ICU patients or four staffed ICU beds.

Search for a Texas city to see hospital ICU occupancy here

ICU capacity at hospitals in Fort Worth the week ending Aug. 12:

<p>Medical City Alliance 3101 North Tarrant Parkway Fort Worth, TX 76177</p> <p>100% of ICU beds were occupied</p> <p>An average of 9 ICU beds were occupied with 0 staffed ICU beds available in the last week</p>	<p>Texas Health Harris Methodist Hospital Alliance 11944 Texas Health Trail Fort Worth, TX 76244</p> <p>100% of ICU beds were occupied</p> <p>An average of 22 ICU beds were occupied with 0 staffed ICU beds available in the last week</p>
<p>Baylor Scott & White All Saints Medical Center 1402 Eighth Ave Fort Worth, TX 76104</p> <p>98% of ICU beds were occupied</p> <p>An average of 37 ICU beds were occupied with 1 staffed ICU bed available in the last week</p>	<p>Texas Health Harris Methodist Hospital Southwest Ft. Worth 8102 Harris Pkwy Fort Worth, TX 76152</p> <p>97% of ICU beds were occupied</p> <p>An average of 17 ICU beds were occupied with 1 staffed ICU bed available in the last week</p>
<p>JPS Health Network 1500 S. Main St. Fort Worth, TX 76104</p> <p>97% of ICU beds were occupied</p> <p>An average of 33 ICU beds were occupied with 1 staffed ICU bed available in the last week</p>	<p>Medical City Fort Worth 900 Eighth Avenue Fort Worth, TX 76104</p> <p>96% of ICU beds were occupied</p> <p>An average of 26 ICU beds were occupied with 1 staffed ICU bed available in the last week</p>
<p>Texas Health Specialty Hospital Fort Worth 1300 Pennsylvania 4th Floor Main Bldg Fort Worth, TX 76104</p> <p>90% of ICU beds were occupied</p> <p>An average of 9 ICU beds were occupied with 1 staffed ICU bed available in the last week</p>	<p>Texas Health Harris Methodist Fort Worth 1301 Pennsylvania Avenue Fort Worth, TX 76104</p> <p>89% of ICU beds were occupied</p> <p>An average of 78 ICU beds were occupied with 10 staffed ICU beds available in the last week</p>
<p>Wise Health System 3200 North Tarrant Parkway Fort Worth, TX 76177</p> <p>0% of ICU beds were occupied</p> <p>An average of 0 ICU beds were occupied with 4 staffed ICU beds available in the last week</p>	<p>Baylor Scott And White Surgical Hospital Fort Worth 1180 Park Place Avenue Fort Worth, TX 76110</p> <p>0% of ICU beds were occupied</p> <p>An average of 0 ICU beds were occupied with 4 staffed ICU beds available in the last week</p>
<p>Cook Childrens Medical Center 801 Seventh Avenue Fort Worth, TX 76104</p> <p>Note: HHS redacted numbers from this hospital because it reported fewer than four staffed ICU beds, fewer than four patients occupying ICU beds or both.</p>	

Note: Because data for hospitals with fewer than four patients occupying ICU beds or fewer than four staffed ICU adult beds is redacted, we cannot calculate the percentage of staffed ICU beds. About 200 out of more than 400 Texas hospitals that reported data to the federal government have fewer than four staffed adult ICU beds at any given time. Source: Department of Health & Human Services. Credit: Carla Astudillo

As of Saturday, 44.4% of Texans have been fully vaccinated. According to Becker's Hospital Review, Texas ranks 57th nationally for the percentage of the eligible population vaccinated.

Walkes said vaccination is still the best hope for blunting the current COVID-19 surge.

"We don't want you to be that person that has to choose a ventilator instead of a vaccine," she said.

Carla Astudillo contributed to this report.

Disclosure: Memorial Hermann Health System has been a financial supporter of The Texas Tribune, a nonprofit, nonpartisan news organization that is funded in part by donations from members, foundations and corporate sponsors. Financial supporters play no role in the Tribune's journalism. Find a complete list of them here.

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