

TRUMP, ARIZONA, & COVID-19

August 2020

Since the beginning of the pandemic, President Trump has downplayed the threat of the virus, declined to listen to experts, and refused to take action to protect Americans from the health and economic toll of the outbreak. In states like Arizona, his failures have exacerbated the consequences of the crisis.

QUICK LOOK:

- President Trump's mismanagement of the coronavirus has had major implications for Arizonans, who are recovering from a massive surge that resulted from Trump's pressure to reopen and that overwhelmed hospitals.
- Arizona Governor Doug Ducey has followed President Trump's lead throughout the pandemic: just as President Trump delayed implementing federal social distancing guidelines, Arizona was among the last states to shut down when the pandemic broke out. Just as President Trump allowed guidelines to expire, Arizona was among the first to reopen in May.
- President Trump and Governor Ducey's rushed reopening caused cases in Arizona to skyrocket. When the state reopened on May 15, there were about 13,000 cases total. That number ballooned to nearly 200,000 by August.
- Despite Arizona's nightmarish experience, testing has dropped across the state. By July 26, Arizona was conducting less than half the tests it had been conducting in the beginning of July.
- Since the beginning of the pandemic, President Trump's failure to shore up supplies of PPE put Arizonans at risk. As recently as late July, even first responders were struggling to get protective gear.
- President Trump failed to hold nursing homes in Arizona accountable for the safety of their residents. One in three nursing facilities has since reported at least one case of COVID-19.
- At every step in the pandemic, Governor Ducey has worked synchronously with President Trump to make things worse for Arizonans. From the push to reopen the economy, to denying the need for masks, to slashing unemployment benefits, the two have compounded the crisis and jeopardized Arizonans.

CASES & DEATHS

- As of August 18, Arizona [had reported](#) 194,920 COVID-19 cases.
- As of August 18, 4,529 Arizonans [had died](#) of coronavirus.

TESTING DISASTER

- President Trump's failure to create a national testing infrastructure impacted Arizonans at the peak of the state's outbreak.
- In July, as cases of COVID-19 surged, Arizonans were forced [to wait for hours](#) in 100+ degree heat to get tested, and routinely [waited for](#) weeks to receive test results.
- After a surge of cases that overwhelmed Arizona's hospitals, testing across the state [dropped in July](#) – despite warnings from experts that the virus still posed a threat.
 - In the beginning of July, Arizona tested an average of 107,000 people each week. By the week of July 26, that number [had dropped](#) by more than 50% to just 51,400.
- Though the situation in Arizona has improved over the last month, experts like Dr. Joshua LaBaer of Arizona State University's Biodesign Institute [say that](#) increased testing is essential: **"I think the more testing we do, the more we can identify those folks who have the virus and get them isolated – and that is the way to actually drive the numbers down, is more testing."**

ONGOING PPE / SUPPLY SHORTAGES

- President Trump's [sparing use](#) of the Defense Production Act failed to fortify the domestic supply chain and exacerbated PPE and medical equipment shortages that impacted Arizonans.
- In the beginning of the pandemic, Arizona health care providers were dangerously [encouraged to](#) reuse PPE amid a shortage.

- In April, as other states [reported](#) that supply shipments were being diverted by federal agents, Phoenix firefighters reported that gowns and N95 masks [were being](#) “hijacked” – possibly by the feds – before reaching Arizona.
- In late July, amid surging cases, first responders in Maricopa county [struggled to](#) get PPE when responding to emergency calls.
- Shortages of protective equipment put care workers in Arizona at risk. [At least](#) three health care workers have died from COVID-19 in the state, while hundreds more have fallen ill.
 - Following the death of Valrena Singer, a nurse at Kayenta Health Center in the Navajo Nation, co-worker Avis Singer [said](#): **“We didn’t have sufficient PPE. A lot of the workers were not utilizing N95s even though we were coming with contact with COVID-positive patients ... It was just basically a surgical mask and gloves.”**
- Amid a swell of cases, Arizona hospitals [were forced](#) to adopt “crisis standards of care,” which guided the allocation of scarce resources to patients based on factors such as “likelihood for survival.”
 - Several advocacy groups filed complaints stating that the state’s crisis standards discriminate against vulnerable groups such as people of color and those with disabilities.

RUSHED REOPENING

- Governor Doug Ducey followed President Trump’s lead on Arizona’s economy. Just as President Trump defied the experts and waited until it was too late to implement social distancing guidelines, Governor Ducey waited until long after other states to close down Arizona.
- Then, as President Trump urged the country to reopen before experts said it was safe to do so, Governor Ducey followed suit – [reopening](#) Arizona on May 15 ahead of other states and at great risk to Arizonans.
- The results were catastrophic. Following Arizona’s rushed reopening, COVID-19 infections grew exponentially – at one point, new cases were [growing faster](#) in Arizona than in *any country in the world*.
 - Phoenix Mayor Kate Gallego attributed the surge in cases to the state’s decision to resume business as usual.
- On June 30, Arizona [once again](#) shut down – but the surge in cases had already set off a corresponding wave of hospitalizations.
 - Hospitalizations [rose steadily](#) from mid-May to mid-July.
 - By July 5, 90% of Arizona’s ICU capacity [was full](#).
 - By July 16, Arizonans were [being transferred](#) to other states because of staffing and hospital bed shortages.
- By the end of July, Arizona began to see deaths due to COVID-19 [rise](#). Though trends are improving, Arizona reported 148 deaths, its second-highest daily death toll, [as recently as](#) August 12.

LONG TERM CARE FACILITIES UNDER SIEGE

- Before the pandemic, the Trump administration rolled back oversight of nursing homes and assisted care facilities [by lowering](#) fines against facilities that had been found to have endangered residents.
- By July, at least ten Arizona nursing homes [had been cited](#) for infection control violations, at least nine of which had reported COVID-19 cases.
 - None of these ten homes were fined for violations, but some, like Sapphire of Tucson Nursing and Rehabilitation, [later received](#) millions in PPP loans from the federal government despite the fact that [it was home](#) to one of Tucson’s largest outbreaks, which resulted in the deaths of at least 20 residents.
- President Trump’s failure to scale up testing also adversely affected those in nursing homes in Arizona. Experts across the country agree that frequent testing is necessary to curb the spread of the virus in nursing homes, but even by mid-July residents and staff in Arizona [were facing](#) long waits for results, rendering tests useless.
- The failure of the administration to hold Arizona nursing homes accountable and protect their residents has had drastic implications for the state’s elderly population: [By June](#), one in three Arizona nursing facilities had reported a case of COVID-19, while one in five had a death related to the disease.
- 72% of Arizona’s COVID-19 deaths are among those age 65 and older, though [insufficient data](#) makes it thus far impossible to determine how many of these deaths occurred in nursing homes.

SCHOOLS

- President Trump has urged schools across the country to reopen without regard for community spread, rising cases, or safety protocols. In doing so, he has falsely claimed that children are immune to the virus
- But in Arizona, children are already more affected by COVID-19 than in any other state:
 - A recent report by the American Academy of Pediatrics [shows that](#) Arizona has more cases of COVID-19 per 100,000 children than any other state in the country.
 - The report further indicated that Arizona has the highest test positivity rate for children – 17.8% – of any state.
 - At least 410 children [have been](#) hospitalized for COVID-19 in Arizona, and at least 12 have died.
- Teachers in Arizona are also at risk. A long time elementary school teacher in Arizona [died after](#) she and two teachers with whom she shared a classroom tested positive for the virus.
- A survey of over 7,600 Arizona teachers found that eight in ten believe schools [should only](#) reopen when health officials deem it is safe to do so.
 - One Arizona special education teacher [writes](#): “Trump has given a new meaning to the term ‘bully pulpit’ by threatening to pull funding from our schools right when we need it the most. Trump is trying to bully schools into reopening unsafely. We won’t let him.”
- But President Trump maintains control over some Arizona schools: the United States Department of the Interior - Indian Affairs [announced](#) that it plans to reopen schools under its jurisdiction “to the maximum extent possible” by September 16, impacting schools in Arizona.
 - Bahozhoi Kinsel, president of the school board that oversees Kaibeto Boarding School in Arizona, blames the federal agency’s failure to close schools in March for the spread of the virus among educators.
 - Kinsel and other members of the board hope for the school to remain closed, but [says](#) President Trump is putting students at risk. Kinsel said: **“This is the Bureau of Indian Education playing God. This is what they do... Leadership is poor in Washington, D.C. What happens above trickles down. It’s like a domino effect. Trump is being an example to his fellow comrades in office and gives Mr. Tony Dearman the full authority to put our younger generation at risk.”**

ECONOMY

- President Trump allowed the pandemic to get out of control, resulting in extreme economic duress for Arizonans. Then, Governor Ducey and President Trump reopened the economy prematurely, putting Arizonan lives at risk. The result has been even greater economic consequences for people across the state.
- In the beginning of the pandemic, the peak of initial unemployment claims filed in Arizona was just over 132,000, filed in April. After the economy closed back down to curb the surge of the virus, claims for pandemic assistance [grew to](#) 266,000 in July.
- Since shutting down a second time, some Arizonans have struggled to receive unemployment benefits.
 - Chris Broadnax, who works at a gym, [said](#): **“We went back to work, we shut down again. I’ve been trying to do my unemployment again, and it’s been hard after that... I’ve reached out. I’ve called them. I don’t think they’re picking up the phone at all. It’s just an automated system I’ve been trying to get through, check my unemployment every day. It’s nothing.”**
- After President Trump and Republicans allowed \$600 in enhanced unemployment benefits to expire in July, Governor Doug Ducey worked with FEMA to extend [just half](#) that amount in continued aid for Arizonans. Arizona [opted out](#) of paying 25% of extended benefits due to budget concerns.

MASKS

- President Trump has routinely mocked and ridiculed masks throughout the pandemic. His failure to set an example on the importance of masks allowed governors like Doug Ducey to deny their importance. As cases surged across the state, Ducey [refused for weeks](#) to allow local mayors to implement mask mandates.
- It was only in mid-June, once cases were already soaring, that Ducey [allowed](#) mayors across Arizona to enact local mandates.
 - Ducey bowed partly in response to pressure from hundreds of medical experts across the state, who sent him a letter outlining the scientific evidence behind mask-wearing.
- Ducey has continued to resist calls to [implement](#) a statewide mandate.

- On June 19, Phoenix's City Council [enacted](#) a face-covering rule, one of several cities across the state to do so. Despite the rule, attendees at President Trump's June 23 rally in Phoenix [mostly declined](#) to wear masks.

RACIAL DISPARITIES

- The Latino community has been one of the most impacted by the coronavirus in Arizona. According to CDC data released August 10, Hispanic children are [8 times more likely](#) to be hospitalized with coronavirus than white children.
- In predominantly Latino and Black communities in Phoenix, people at times [waited up to 14 hours](#) in line to get tested.
- While accounting for only 4% of the state's population, Native populations [account](#) for 15.7% of Arizona's coronavirus hospitalizations, [and](#) 13% of Arizona's COVID-19 deaths.