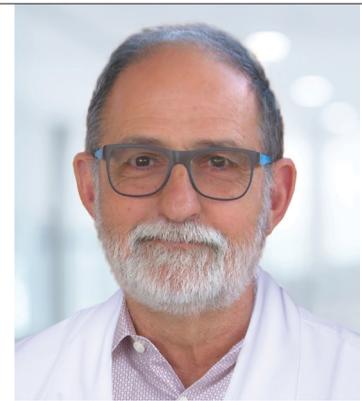


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COVID-19 | STAY SAFE

*Dr. George Rapier is
the founder of WellMed*



My Fellow Americans,

The United States is now responsible for 20 percent of all new COVID-19 infections worldwide. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the greatest number of new cases is among young adults and is coming from 22 states in the South and West. After months of quarantine and social distancing, COVID-19 is not throwing in the towel just yet, and neither should we.

You may have heard some news outlets report that the number of new cases is decreasing. In fact, the number of new daily cases nationwide has remained steady — at around 20,000. But when you look past the national average, you will find a regional story that's quite alarming. It's literally the tale of two cities.

On the one hand are cities like Detroit, New York and Washington, D.C. They were once the epicenters during the initial outbreak, but are now reporting rapid declines in new infections.

On the other hand are cities like Houston, Atlanta and Miami. They seemed immune in January and February, but are now dealing with record infections. In Dallas County, for example, health officials reported a single-day record on Monday of 454 new Coronavirus cases. Austin Mayor Steve Adler claims residents in his city are three times more likely to catch the virus now than three weeks ago.

Some argue the increase in infections is the result of increased testing. Dr. Tom Inglesby, director of the Center for Health Security at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, disagrees. He believes that large indoor gatherings and the failure to follow the CDC's social-distance guidelines may be leading to "super-spreading."

"We should be encouraging people to wear face coverings, to stay at a distance, to avoid large gatherings, to use hand sanitizer or wash your hands," Inglesby said.

Young adults may also have a role. Young people account for the highest number of new cases in Florida and Louisiana. In Dallas County, nearly half of all new Coronavirus infections were among 18- to 39-year-olds. It's clear no one is immune. Younger people must heed the warnings. That's especially true as more Southern states relax restrictions on non-essential businesses.

So where do we go from here? Dr. Ashish Jha, director of the Harvard Global Health Institute, says the restrictions we are all so desperate to shed, will likely need to continue for the foreseeable future.

"Not only is it not fading out," said Jha, "this will be with us for at least another 12 months, and that's the most optimistic scenario for having a vaccine."

I agree. We are likely still a year away from any effective treatment or vaccine. It's time for all of us to get back to what we know works. Without a vaccine, precaution is our only answer at this time. We need to embrace precaution as our new norm. It's the only way we will get on the other side of this for the near future.

Take care and be safe, and be sure to check on your loved ones and neighbors this July Fourth weekend. Remember, FaceTime and Zoom are great ways to still stay connected.



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