



Local

State cases in children have soared with schools reopening

By Cindy Krischer Goodman

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In the past two-and-a-half weeks, as schools opened for in-person learning in some parts of Florida, Covid-19 cases in children jumped by more than 23% with about 9,200 new infections.

Florida Department of Health data shows 48,928 confirmed cases among children through Aug. 26, compared with 39,735 confirmed cases on Aug. 9, with most of the infections occurring in teenagers between 14 and 17 years old.

The recent August numbers represent a whopping 191% increase in children infected in Florida from only about six weeks earlier on July 9.

On Friday, health department data shows 700 new cases in a single day for Florida children or young adults 24 and younger.

In addition, a state report on Covid-19 outbreaks at schools, from daycare centers to colleges, showed that nearly 900 students and staffers tested positive during a two-week period in August as the facilities began to reopen, according to The Miami Herald.

Florida counties such as Suwannee and Baker in North Florida welcomed students back to school in mid-August and are following quarantine protocols for students who have tested positive in an effort to contain the spread. South Florida public schools began the school year with online learning.

Florida Surgeon General Scott Rivkees told county health directors Friday he is working with the schools in districts that have re-opened for in-person learning to identify children who have symptoms and get them tested.

The American Academy of Pediatrics advocates for in-person education, but has acknowledged many school districts where the virus is widespread will need to adopt virtual lessons.

"We know that children often show few or no symptoms of COVID-19. We also know they are not immune to this virus, and they can become very sick," American Academy of Pediatrics President Dr. Sally Goza said in a statement.

In Florida, some children are getting more severe symptoms from the virus - 611 children have been hospitalized and eight have died. The youngest to die was a 6-year-old girl in Hillsborough County. A South Florida health official has expressed concern the disease could cause lifelong damage even for children with mild illness.

South Florida's children's hospitals also are seeing more cases of a rare COVID-related illness that attacks children and teens. Florida Department of Health reported 50 confirmed cases of children with the multisystem inflammatory syndrome (MIS-C) as of Aug. 26, an increase of 20 new cases in the last two weeks.

Ronald Ford, chief medical officer for Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital, says he saw the increase coming when the state's positive infection rate rose - and he expects more cases in the next few weeks. The syndrome tends to come on fast and attack children who were exposed to COVID-19 three to four weeks earlier.

Overall, the positivity rate for children in Florida has been higher than adults. The positivity rate in Florida for children under 18 who have been tested is 15%, slightly higher than the state's overall positivity rate of 13.5% for all ages. Positivity is viewed as a key way to gauge the prevalence of the disease.

For adults, the situation in Florida has improved. Overall, daily totals for new cases in Florida for all ages reflect a downward trend in August and hospitalizations are down as well.

Cindy Goodman can be reached at cgoodman@

sunsentinel.com or 954-304-5908.

School districts face a difficult-perhaps impossible-task this year: to teach while keeping them safe from COVID-19. Some districts are already back in session, and in Florida, the number of infected is rising. | DavidCarpio/Shutterstock

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