



[Health Experts Warn that the United States is in a New Phase of the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

Dr. Deborah Birx warned that the United States is in a new phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the virus being extraordinarily widespread in both large cities and rural areas. She added that “what we are seeing today is different from March and April” and is much more extensive throughout the country than those spring outbreaks. Birx emphasized the danger of asymptomatic transmission and urged Americans in coronavirus hot spots to consider wearing a mask at home if they live with someone who is especially vulnerable. Dr. Anthony Fauci agreed with his colleague’s assessment regarding a new phase of the pandemic in which the virus is spreading uncontrolled in some states by asymptomatic carriers. Fauci noted that this “insidious” form of community spread makes it even more difficult to suppress and contain the overall outbreak.

In addition to Dr. Birx and Dr. Fauci, other health experts including Admiral Brett Giroir, an assistant secretary at the Department of Health and Human Services, also chimed in. Giroir echoed the sentiments of Birx and stressed the importance of mask wearing, hand washing, and avoiding crowds. He pointed out the fact that in recent weeks, these methods seemed to be alleviating the situation in Arizona and a few other states that have been hit particularly hard by the coronavirus this summer. Above all, Giroir highlighted the effectiveness of mask wearing in communities experiencing an outbreak: “Wearing a mask is incredibly important, but we have to have like 85 or 90 percent of individuals wearing a mask and avoiding crowds. Those percentages give you the same outcome as a complete shutdown.” Giroir added that “The public health message is we’ve got to have mask wearing. If we don’t do that, and if we don’t limit the indoor crowded spaces, the virus will continue to run.”

Birx’s assessment of the state of COVID-19 in the United States showed the critical way in which the current phase differs from what transpired back in March and April. She concluded that unlike those series of outbreaks in mainly large cities and metropolitan areas, the coronavirus is now prevalent in both urban and rural environments. As a result, people in rural communities need to understand that they are not isolated from the virus and are “not immune or protected” from it either. In fact, some health experts fear that rural areas may be the next hot spots for COVID-19. This past weekend, states with considerable communities of this kind, such as Montana and Oklahoma, saw their largest increases in positive cases to date.

Coronavirus hot spots and major outbreaks are no longer contained to densely-populated metropolitan areas and instead, both urban and rural areas are seeing similar rates of spread. In the state of Tennessee for example, a newly released report from Vanderbilt University shows that smaller towns are witnessing a substantial growth in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations. Early on during the outbreak of the pandemic, three-quarters of Tennessee’s infections were concentrated in the large cities of Nashville and Memphis, however, the majority of new infections are now originating in less-populated communities well outside of those areas.