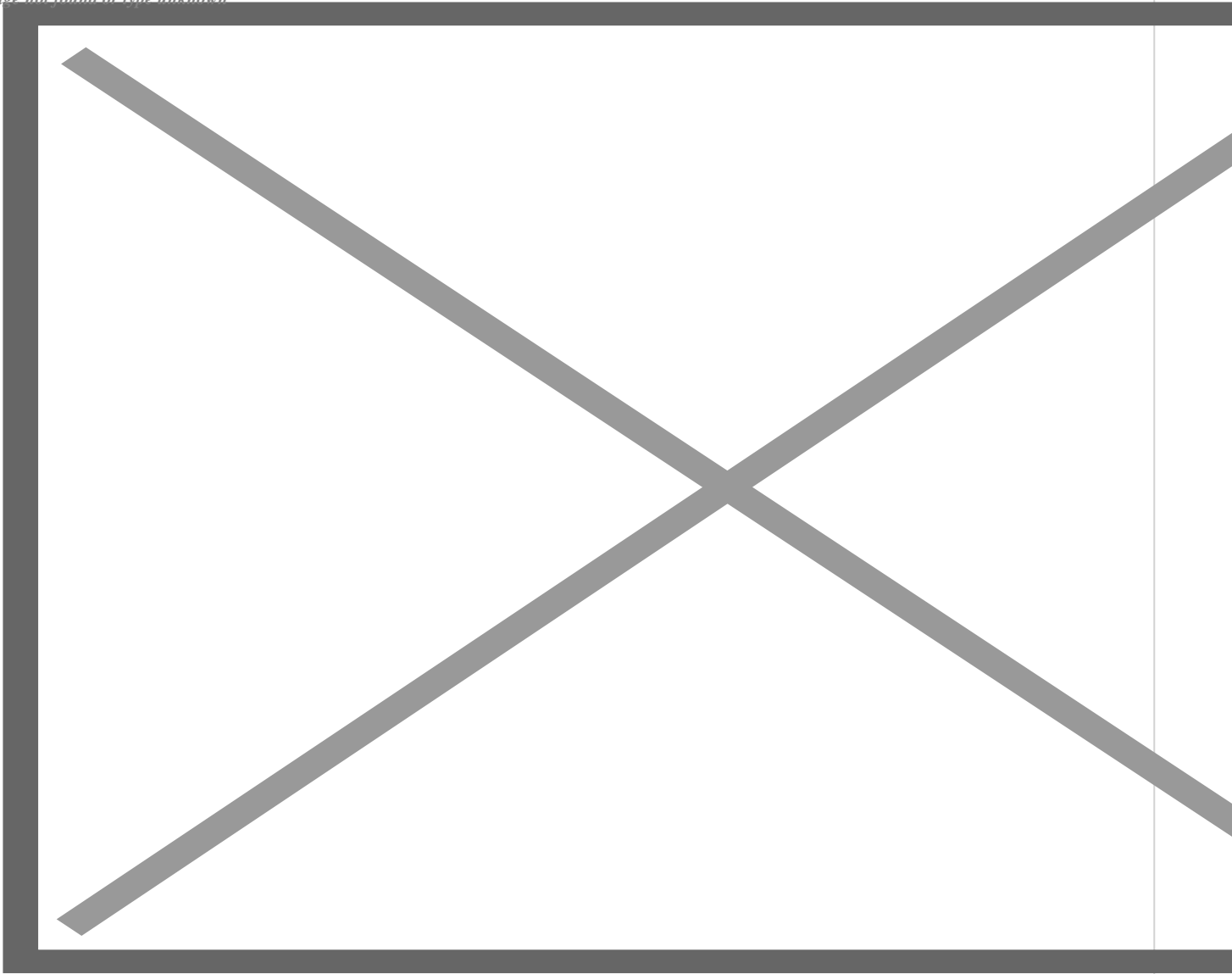


U.S. deaths from COVID-19 surpass 700,000

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Coronavirus misinformation has been rampant in the US, and masking remains a political issue
[File: Lindsay DeDario/Reuters]

Washington, October 2 (RHC)-- The United States has surpassed 700,000 deaths from COVID-19, according to figures from Johns Hopkins University, remaining the world's worst affected country with about 15 percent of worldwide fatalities.

The grim toll -- roughly equivalent to the population of the nation's capital, Washington, DC -- was reached late on Friday with an average of well over 1,000 people dying each day in a country where 55.7 percent of the population is now fully vaccinated, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The last 100,000 deaths occurred during a time when vaccines, which overwhelmingly prevent deaths, hospitalisations and serious illness, were available to any American over the age of 12.

After a heavily criticized early response to the pandemic, the U.S. organized an effective vaccine rollout with sometimes more than four million injections per day. The campaign, however, has since slowed considerably as a significant portion of U.S. citizens is still refusing to get the shots just as the highly contagious Delta variant of the coronavirus tore through the country and send the death toll from 600,000 to 700,000 in three and a half months.

The state of Florida suffered by far the most deaths of any state during that period, with the virus killing about 17,000 residents since the middle of June. Texas was second with 13,000 deaths. The two states account for 15 percent of the country's population, but more than 30 percent of the nation's deaths since the nation crossed the 600,000 threshold.

Dr David Dowdy, an infectious disease epidemiologist at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health who has analysed publicly reported state data, said it was safe to say at least 70,000 of the last 100,000 deaths were in unvaccinated people. And of those vaccinated people who died with breakthrough infections, most caught the virus from an unvaccinated person, he said.

"If we had been more effective in our vaccination, then I think it's fair to say, we could have prevented 90 percent of those deaths," since mid-June, Dowdy was quoted as saying by The Associated Press news agency.

Coronavirus misinformation has been rampant and masking remains a political issue, dividing many in the country. Some Republican governors, such as those in Texas and Florida, have sought to ban mandatory masking in their states, citing individual freedoms.

The Democratic-run state of California, on the other hand, announced on Friday that COVID-19 vaccinations will be compulsory for all students. The move would make California the first state in the nation to make this a mandate, Governor Gavin Newsom said.

In Washington, hundreds of thousands of white flags fluttered on the grass on the National Mall, not far from the White House, as sombre reminders of those who have died of COVID-19 in the country.

Nearly 4.8 million people worldwide have died since the outbreak was detected in China in December 2019, according to a tally from Johns Hopkins University.

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