



Moving to the front

Benton runners prepare for postseason. SPORTS, PAGE B1

Going against Fauci

President rejects scientific advice regarding COVID-19. NATION & WORLD, PAGE A6

Pullen sentenced

Carbondale man gets 72 years for fatal 2017 shooting. LOCAL & STATE, PAGE A3

MORE RESTRICTIONS FOR REGION



BYRON HETZLER, THE SOUTHERN

Gov. J.B. Pritzker announces a return to increased COVID-19 mitigation measures for Illinois Region 5, which includes all of Southern Illinois, during a briefing at the Jackson County Health Department on Monday in Murphysboro. The restrictions, which go into effect on Thursday, ban indoor dining and bar service, along with limiting gatherings to less than 25 people.

State positivity rates on the rise

Pritzker says COVID cases moving in wrong direction

JERRY NOWICKI
Capitol News Illinois

SPRINGFIELD — Hospitalizations for COVID-19 and the rolling seven-day test positivity rate for the virus increased again in Illinois on Monday, mirroring national trends.

Gov. J.B. Pritzker said at a Jackson County news conference Monday the state would increase mitigations in southern Illinois and announced he would once again hold daily weekday COVID-19 briefings until metrics start to decrease.

“While we continue to see a safer pandemic landscape than back in April and May, in terms of positivity, hospital capacity and community spread... Things have changed,” Pritzker said while noting Illinois’ positivity rates are still generally lower than its Midwest neighbors. “Every region of the state has started to move in the wrong direction.”

The statewide rolling positivity rate — which is driven lower

by a massive saliva testing program at the University of Illinois that often yields positivity rates on campus of less than 1% — increased to 5.4% as of Monday, marking 15 straight days of increases.

That came as the state reported an average of 3,662 new cases each day from Saturday through Monday among an average of 68,490 test results reported each day. Another 71 COVID-19-positive people died over the three-day period. That brought the death toll since the pandemic began to 9,236 among 347,161 confirmed cases with more than 6.8 million test results reported.

Hospitalizations, intensive care bed usage and ventilator usage for COVID-19 all spiked in the state as of Sunday evening as well.

Still, Pritzker said the state can better track the virus than it once could due to increased testing and better knowledge of the virus. That means the state’s response will continue to be targeted to the 11 mitigation regions.

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‘The virus is serious’

Pritzker announces greater mitigation for all of local region

MARILYN HALSTEAD
The Southern

MURPHYSBORO — Gov. J.B. Pritzker announced in a news conference Monday at Jackson County Public Health Department that Region 5 of Illinois’ COVID-19 plan, which includes all of deep Southern Illinois, will see greater virus mitigation measures beginning 12:01 a.m. Thursday.

“While we see a safer pandemic landscape than in April and May, in terms of positivity, hospital capacity and community spread, and we are much safer than other states across the Midwest, things have changed. Every region across the state has started to move in the wrong direction. Cases, positivity rates, hospitalizations and deaths are rising statewide,” Pritzker said.

Over the weekend, Southern Illinois triggered a fail-safe by reaching a rolling seven-day positivity rate over 8%. On Monday, that rate sat at 9.1% for Oct. 16, the latest day for which data was available. Hospital admissions also are increasing across the region.

According to a news release from Illinois Department of Public Health, the mitigation mea-

asures include:

Bars

- No indoor service
- All outside bar service closes at 11 p.m.
- All bar patrons should be seated at tables outside
- No ordering, seating, or congregating at bar (bar stools should be removed)
- Tables should be 6 feet apart
- No standing or congregating indoors or outdoors while waiting for a table or exiting
- No dancing or standing indoors
- Reservations required for each party
- No seating of multiple parties at one table

Restaurants

- No indoor dining or bar service
- All outdoor dining closes at 11 p.m.
- Outside dining tables should be 6 feet apart
- No standing or congregating indoors or outdoors while waiting for a table or exiting
- Reservations required for each party
- No seating of multiple parties at one table

Meetings, social events, gatherings

- Limit to lesser of 25 guests or 25% of overall room capacity

- No party buses
- Gaming and casinos close at 11 p.m., are limited to 25% capacity, and follow mitigations for bars and restaurants, if applicable

Region 5 includes Marion, Jefferson, Wayne, Edwards, Wabash, Perry, Jackson, Franklin, Williamson, Saline, Hamilton, White, Gallatin, Union, Johnson, Pope, Hardin, Alexander, Massac and Pulaski counties.

According to the IDPH news release, businesses and communities in Region 5 will receive priority consideration for the current round of Business Interruption Grants due to the greater restrictions.

Illinois Department of Public Health Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike, who accompanied the governor to Murphysboro, addressed some misconceptions of COVID-19, saying many of those who died are people in their 70s and older, but every week Illinois is reporting the deaths of people in their 20s, 30s and 40s.

“The point is the virus is serious. We are still continuing to learn about it, so I don’t want anyone to have a false sense of security because they are young or don’t have known medical conditions that they have nothing to worry about. We all need to be thinking and to be concerned about this virus,” she said.

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COVID-19

Relief deal not likely before Nov. election

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — House Speaker Nancy Pelosi reported some progress in advance of a Tuesday deadline for reaching a deal with President Donald Trump on a coronavirus relief package before the election, but the same core problems bedeviling the effort remain in place despite optimistic talk from the president and his team.

Meanwhile, the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases across the planet surpassed 40 million on Monday, but experts say that is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the true impact of the pandemic that has upended life and work around the world.

The numbers come from Johns Hopkins University, which collates reports from around the

world. The actual worldwide tally of COVID-19 cases is likely to be far higher, as testing has been uneven or limited, many people have had no symptoms and some governments have concealed the true number of cases. More than 1.1 million confirmed virus deaths have been reported, though experts also believe that number is an undercount.

The U.S., India and Brazil report by far the highest numbers of cases — 8.1 million, 7.5 million and 5.2 million respectively — though the global increase in recent weeks was driven by a surge in Europe, which has seen more than 240,000 confirmed virus deaths in the pandemic.

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ELECTION 2020

Vacancy opens on Williamson County board

Ron Ellis announced he would not be seeking reelection

MOLLY PARKER
The Southern

MARION — There will soon be a new face on the Williamson County Board of Commissioners. Ron Ellis, who has served since 2008, announced last year that he did not plan to seek reelection after 12 years of service.

Squaring off on the Nov. 3 ballot for his open seat are Republican Tim Atkisson, of Marion, and Independent Angelo Hightower, of Cartersville.

Both candidates say their various career experiences would be a

benefit to the job. They both also expressed a desire to give back to the region. Williamson County commissioners — there are three of them — run for six-year terms on a staggered schedule. Commissioners receive a base salary of about \$70,000.

“I want to try to do something that will help our area,” Atkisson said. “Southern Illinois has been very good to my family, and this is a way in which I can actually try to help make things better for other people.”

If elected, Hightower said he would create a countywide youth mentorship program especially geared toward at-risk youth.

He said he would donate 5% of his salary to bolster the program, and hopes his pledge would en-



Hightower



Atkisson

courage other county officials to do the same.

Hightower said he envisions something similar to the youth-oriented program he oversaw at the Marion Police Department, where he worked from 2000 to 2015. Hightower resigned from the police department that year upon his election to the Marion City Council, as holding both roles would have been a conflict of in-

terest. He served as a councilman from 2015 to 2019. During that time, he was employed as an officer with the Cartersville Police Department. Last year, he ran unsuccessfully for mayor of Marion. After the election, he was rehired by the Marion Police Department, where he presently serves as a school safety officer assigned to the Marion Junior High and High School.

“I’ve been involved in public service for so many years. This is just an extension of that service,” Hightower said of his desire to run.

Atkisson built his career as a private business owner. He owns A1 Plumbing Co. in Marion, which primarily focuses on contract commercial plumbing work. He sits on the board of directors of the Egyptian Association of Plumbing

and Heating Contractors and on the Illinois State Plumbing Board, which administers tests to apprentice plumbers.

This is Atkisson’s first run for public office. “I never anticipated ever having a political career. It just was never in the realm of possibilities,” he said. Atkisson said he was encouraged to consider the possibility by his friend, Jim Marlo, a current county commissioner. Atkisson’s wife is a teacher with the Marion school district, where Marlo’s wife also works. A few years ago, after a classroom reassignment that put them closer together, Atkisson and Marlo’s wife struck up a friendship, and then the husbands did as well, Atkisson said.

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