

Voices: Letter to North Texas churches: Go fully online this weekend

June 26, 2020

Dear North Texas Churches:

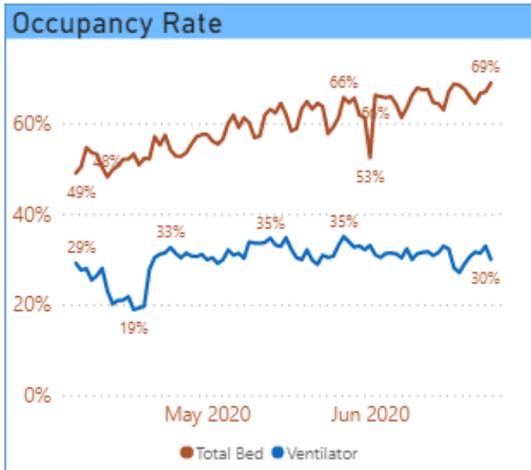
This weekend is the most important weekend of the entire COVID-19 pandemic. If there ever has been a time to close your doors and go fully online, that time is now.

I fear media coverage and governmental orders will hide this fact from you, which is why I'm writing.

Statistics

Here are some of the reasons I think this weekend is the most important weekend of the pandemic in North Texas. I'll focus on Tarrant and Dallas counties.

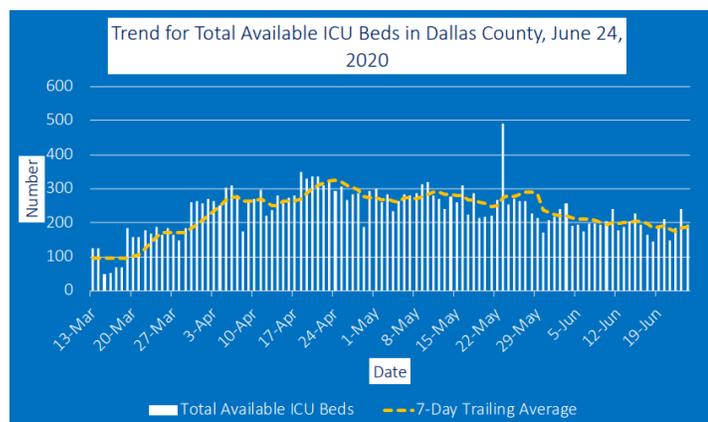
Let's start with hospital bed numbers.



Source [Tarrant County Public Health](#)

As of yesterday, Tarrant County hospitals were at 69 percent capacity. If the trend continues, they will be at roughly 80 percent capacity by the end of July. That is if the trend continues. There is good reason to think, however, the trend will not continue but will increase exponentially. More on this in a minute.

Dallas County reports only 200 ICU beds available as of June 24—since ICU beds are where many COVID-19 patients end up. If the trend continues, there will be about 150 beds available by the end of July.



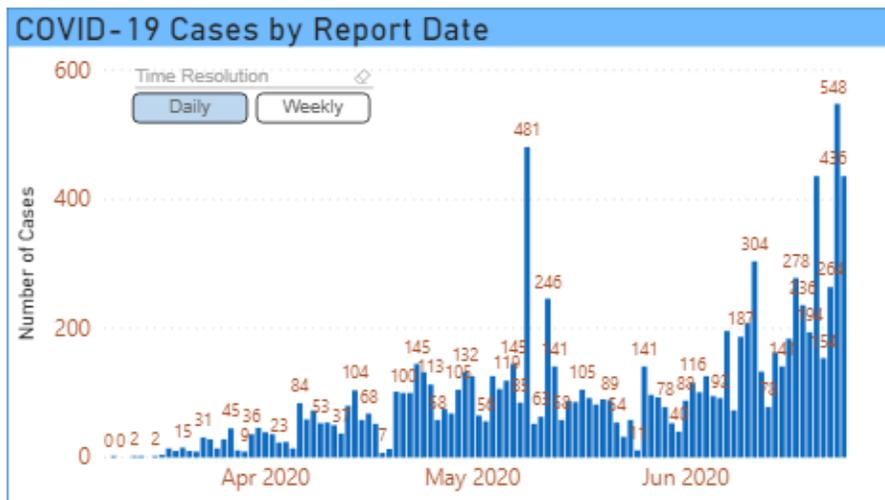
Source [Dallas County COVID-19 Monitoring Data](#)

Once again, however, there is good reason to think the trend will not continue. The number of available beds will drop more rapidly in the next few weeks.

Moving to the testing results will show why we have good reason to think the trends I mentioned above will not continue. In other words, things will get worse.

Both Tarrant and Dallas counties are reporting their highest daily case numbers of the pandemic thus far. This can be seen in the following graphs.

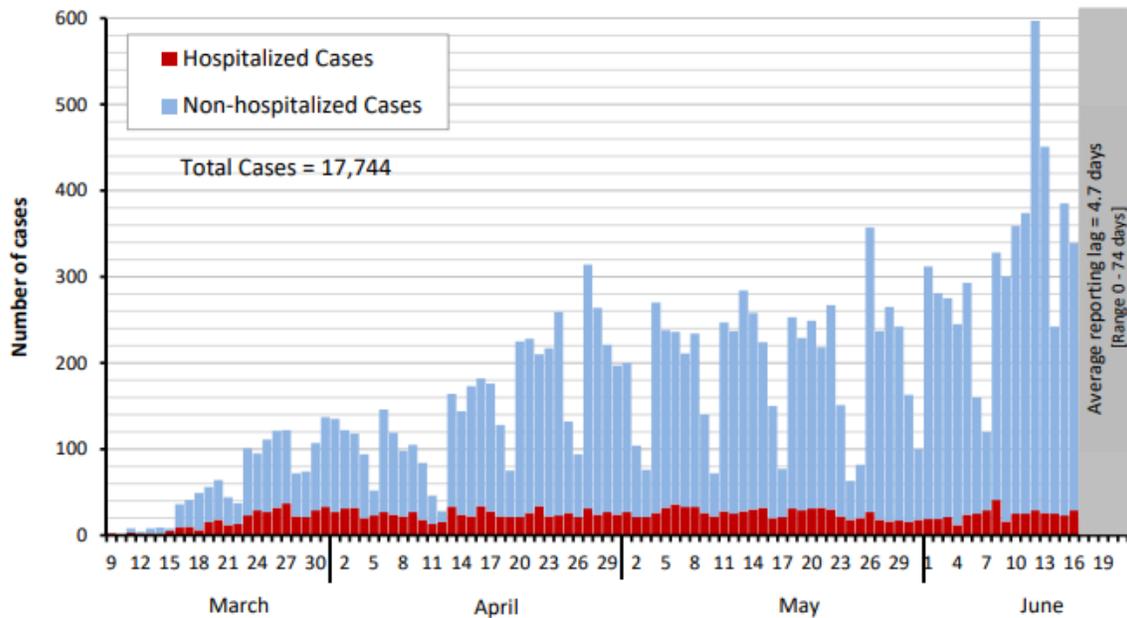
Tarrant County



Source [Tarrant County Public Health](#)

Dallas County

Figure 1. Daily COVID-19 cases by date of test collection, Dallas County: March 10 – June 23, 2020 ¹⁻⁴



1. Data received as of 8:00 pm, June 22, 2020, for residents of Dallas County tested with known specimen collection dates. This does include delayed results from previous days. All data are preliminary and subject to change as cases continue to be investigated.
2. Data are incomplete for the most recent dates. Test results may be reported to DCHHS several days after the result. The reporting lag is calculated as time from specimen collection to receipt of test results. The average reporting lag is 4.7 days, with a range from 0 – 74 days.
3. The validity of results based on antibody tests is not yet known. This summary report includes only confirmed cases based on PCR test results.
4. Bars are the number of positive PCR tests which were collected that day.

Source [Dallas County Health and Human Services 2019 Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Summary](#)

I know many of my readers will be skeptical of the total case numbers. You also might notice the hospitalized cases on this last graph are a very small percentage of the total cases. Furthermore, you might notice they seem to be relatively consistent.

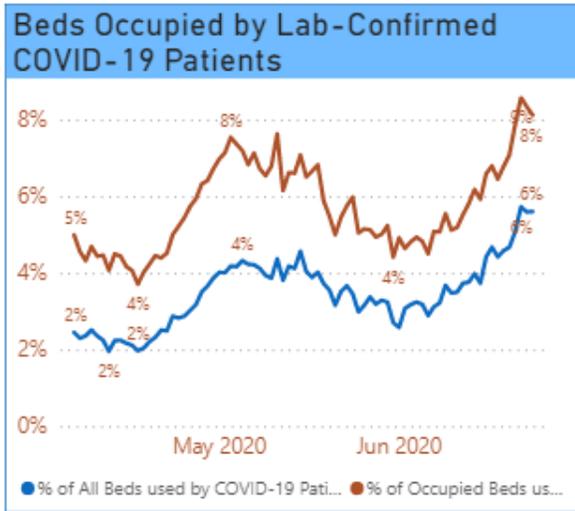
People will use charts like this to mislead you into thinking things are safer than they are. Let me show you why these charts are misleading.

The key statistic: Hospitalizations due

to COVID-19

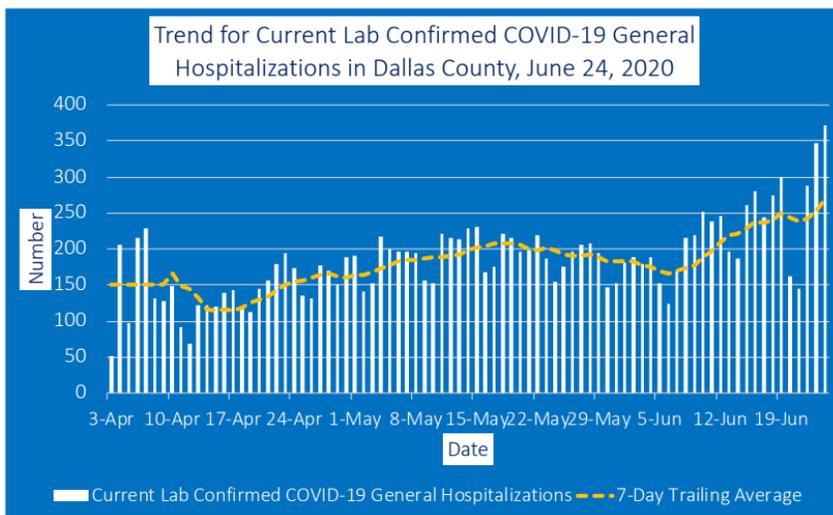
The most important statistic for us to consider this weekend is the number of hospitalizations due to COVID-19. Here are the charts:

Tarrant County



Source [Tarrant County Public Health](#)

Dallas County



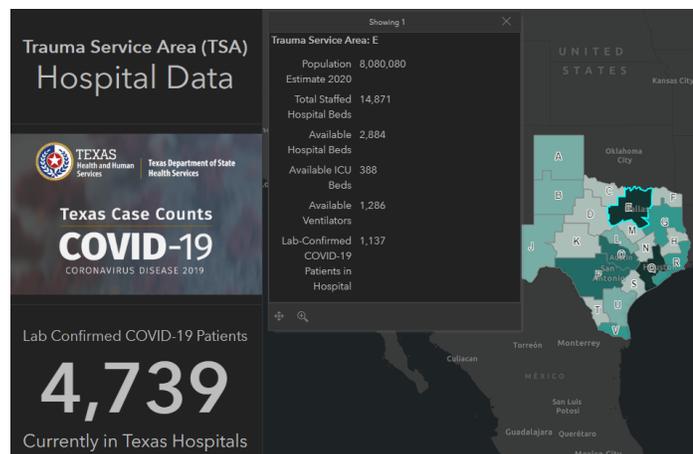
Source [Dallas County COVID-19 Monitoring Data](#)

Notice the trends. The hospitalizations due to COVID-19 are increasing more rapidly than the trends we noticed above. At these rates, hospitals likely will be full by the end of July.

What this means for church this Sunday

All of these numbers support the fact this Sunday, June 28, is the most important Sunday of the whole pandemic. If there ever has been a time to close your doors and go fully online, this Sunday is the time.

According to a [Pew Research Study](#), 41 percent of Dallas-Fort Worth residents attend religious services on a weekly basis. With a population of roughly [6 million](#) that would mean 2,460,000 people attend religious services on a weekly basis.



Source [Texas Health and Human Services](#)

Of course, many churches in the area still are not open at full capacity. Furthermore, many people will stay home this weekend because of the rising case reports. Therefore, let's cut that number by 90 percent. In other words, assume nine out of 10 Dallas-Fort Worth churchgoers stay home this Sunday. In that scenario, there will be 246,000 churchgoers who

potentially will be exposed to the virus.

Compare this number to the 2,884 available hospital beds in Trauma Service Area E—an area that includes Dallas-Fort Worth along with the most populated areas in the rest of North Texas.

If we assume 5 percent of churchgoers will contract COVID-19 at church this Sunday, that would be enough to overrun area hospitals.

In Tarrant County, for example, [20 percent of COVID-19 cases have required hospitalization](#). If 5 percent of churchgoers contracted the disease and 20 percent of those churchgoers ended up in the hospital, this would take 2,460 beds. We only have 2,884 beds available in all of North Texas.

Keep in mind: I've assumed nine out of 10 churchgoers will stay home this Sunday. Keep in mind: We're only talking about churchgoers—41 percent of the total population in Dallas-Fort Worth.

Perhaps you are inclined to think I've exaggerated in my estimates. Is it really that likely 5 percent of those who go to church this Sunday will contract COVID-19?

I'm not sure.

But you also are not sure the 5 percent will not contract COVID-19.

I believe we should err on the side of caution.

I believe we should close our church doors this Sunday and go fully online.

Jared Brandt is a philosophy professor and amateur coffee roaster. He and his wife Courtney—a Nurse Practitioner—attend Fielder Church from their living room. The views expressed are those solely of the author.