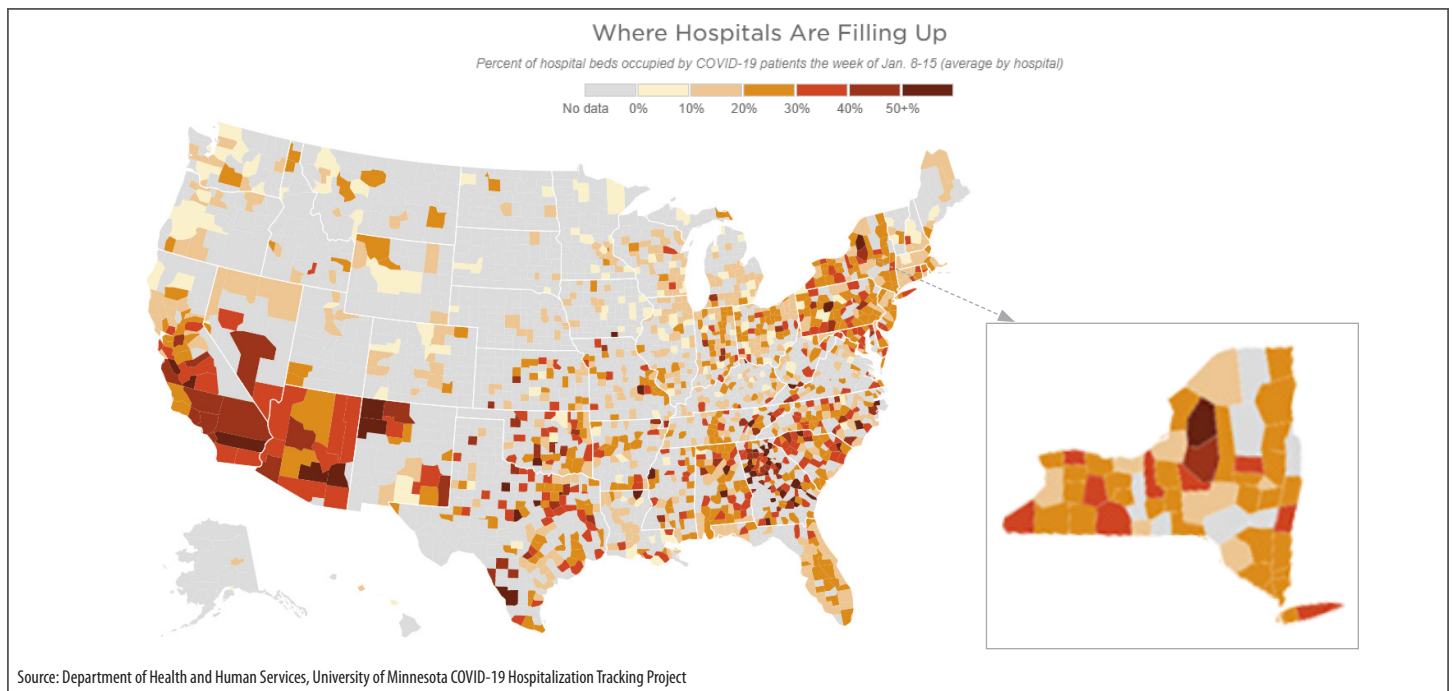# new york minute

Are NYS hospitals overloaded with COVID-19 patients?

by **Jan Vink, Adriana Hernandez,** and **Robin Blakely-Armitage,** Cornell University

As the cases of COVID-19 continue to increase, health care systems are being stretched to the brink. Globally the number of infected is approaching 97 million, with over 2 million deaths[1]. Daily new cases are in the hundreds of thousands in the U.S.; and while the daily new cases in NYS remained fairly stable between June and September (at around 1,000), cases have risen dramatically since, with over 20,000 new cases diagnosed just on January 15, 2021.

The impacts of this escalation are enormous, including the toll on local hospitals (in particular, for smaller non-metro areas[2]). Hospital administrators become concerned when the number of hospital beds filled with COVID-19 patients exceeds 10%; anything above 20% represents "extreme stress", and above 50% indicates severe overload, potentially compromising the hospital's ability to address other patient needs. NPR created a tool[3] using regularly updated hospital-level data[4] that provides the ratio of COVID-19 hospitalization to total hospital beds at the U.S. county-level. In New York State, this ratio ranges from 59% in Lewis County to 10% in St. Lawrence County (there are several counties for which no data is currently reported). For many fiscally strapped non-metro hospitals serving an older, often sicker, demographic with less routine access to health care, the impacts of COVID have exposed the broader vulnerabilities in our health care system.

Where Hospitals Are Filling Up

Percent of hospital beds occupied by COVID-19 patients the week of Jan. 8-15 (average by hospital)

No data 0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50+%

Source: Department of Health and Human Services, University of Minnesota COVID-19 Hospitalization Tracking Project

[1] worldometers.info/coronavirus/

[2] https://ldi.upenn.edu/news/already-fiscal-crisis-rural-hospitals-face-covid-19; https://www.healthaffairs.org/do/10.1377/hblog20200429.583513/full/; https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analy-sis/blogs/stateline/2020/10/20/covid-19-patients-swamp-rural-hospitals

[3] https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/12/09/944379919/new-data-reveal-which-hospitals-are-dangerously-full-is-yours#lookup

[4] https://healthdata.gov/dataset/covid-19-reported-patient-impact-and-hospital-capacity-facility

Additional Resources

Coronavirus in the U.S.: Latest Map and Case Count https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/coronavirus-us-cases.html

New York State county-level data and links to county health websites https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/usa/new-york/