

Arkansas' count of coronavirus cases rose by 1,061 Saturday, setting a record for the number of cases added in a single day. Sunday logged another 503 new cases for a total of 28,367 afflicted with the disease. The state also recorded 8 more deaths bringing the total to 321. Arkansas also has 6,400 active current cases in the state

"The record number of new cases is very concerning and may be the result of the July 4th celebrations," Gov. Asa Hutchinson said in a statement.

"Regardless, it is a reminder of the challenge we continue to face. As we dig deeper into the data, I will have further comments on Monday."

On Saturday, a spokesman for Hutchinson defended the lack of a statewide requirement for people to wear masks, a day after the chancellor of the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences called for such a mandate.

Appearing on Arkansas PBS' "Arkansas Week" on Friday evening, UAMS Chancellor Cam Patterson said Hutchinson had "made it clear that everyone should be masking," but that the lack of a statewide mandate had created confusion.

"It's really difficult to make the case to somebody in a town like Little Rock that they need to wear a mask if there's a town 30 miles away where masking is not required," Patterson said. "It creates a situation in which people don't know what to believe."

Hutchinson has said a statewide mask mandate wouldn't be appropriate, noting that some of the state's 75 counties have few active cases.

Joe Thompson, chief executive of UAMS' Arkansas Center for Health Improvement, said on "Arkansas Week" that the state is "at risk of losing control" of the virus.

"We are seeing a 20[%]-30% increase in hospitalizations and ventilator use week over week," he said. "Testing more people does not cause more hospitalizations and more ventilator use.

"That's more people becoming sick and succumbing to the effects of this virus."

Patterson said on the TV program that the intensive-care unit at UAMS Medical Center is "completely full, and we know the number of cases is going to continue to increase over the coming weeks."

"At some point, while we may have the capacity across the entire state, we may have the resources across the entire state, to take care of every covid-19 infected patient, those resources are not necessarily going to be in the right place," Patterson said. "So as this progresses, we are going to see capacity constraints and limitations on our ability to provide care unless we effectively bend the curve soon."

He also said officials should prepare carefully for the return of students to classrooms in the coming school year.

"No place in the world has opened schools with a rising rate of infection," Patterson said. "So no matter what we do, we need to be prepared to be surprised, and we need to put as much effort into our plans to shut down schools right now as we're putting into opening them up, because inevitably we will have to shut down school systems once they've opened up if outbreaks occur in those school districts."