

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — More than 600 new coronavirus cases were confirmed in Arkansas and seven more deaths were reported Wednesday while a new White House report kept the state in the red zone for new virus cases per capita, officials said.

Pine Bluff, Jonesboro, Fort Smith, Harrison, Blytheville and Texarkana were all identified as in the "red zone" because of the number of new cases and local test positivity rates, the White House report said.

The White House Coronavirus Task Force puts a county or metropolitan area in the red zone if during the last week it reported both new cases more than 100 per 100,000 population and lab test positivity results more than 10%.

Miller County was one of 28 Arkansas counties in the task force's yellow zone last week. That means it reported both new cases between 10 and 100 per 100,000 population and positive testing between 5% and 10%, or one of those two conditions and one red zone condition.

The difference indicates that new cases and/or positivity rate in Texarkana are higher than those in Miller County as a whole.

The Task Force said the state had the eighth-highest rate for new cases last week, reporting 124 per 100,000 people. But the report noted that new cases and the rate of positive coronavirus tests has trended downward in the past week.

The state's rate of positive tests was down 2 percentage points to 7.6% over the previous week, the report said. The national rate of positive tests was 4.8%, according to the report, dated Sept. 13.

Meanwhile, an [updated model](#) from the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences' Fay W. Boozman College of Public Health predicts that virus cases will peak in Arkansas in late December. The model, which is updated every two weeks, predicts that cases will then begin a slow downward trend in the first months of 2021.

Gov. Asa Hutchinson said both the UAMS model and the White House report serve as a reminder of the severity of COVID-19, the illness linked to the coronavirus.

"Both of those remind us that we've made progress but we have more work to do," Hutchinson said.

The actual number of virus cases in Arkansas is likely higher than reported because many people have not been tested, and studies suggest people can be infected and not feel sick.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and a cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia, and death.

