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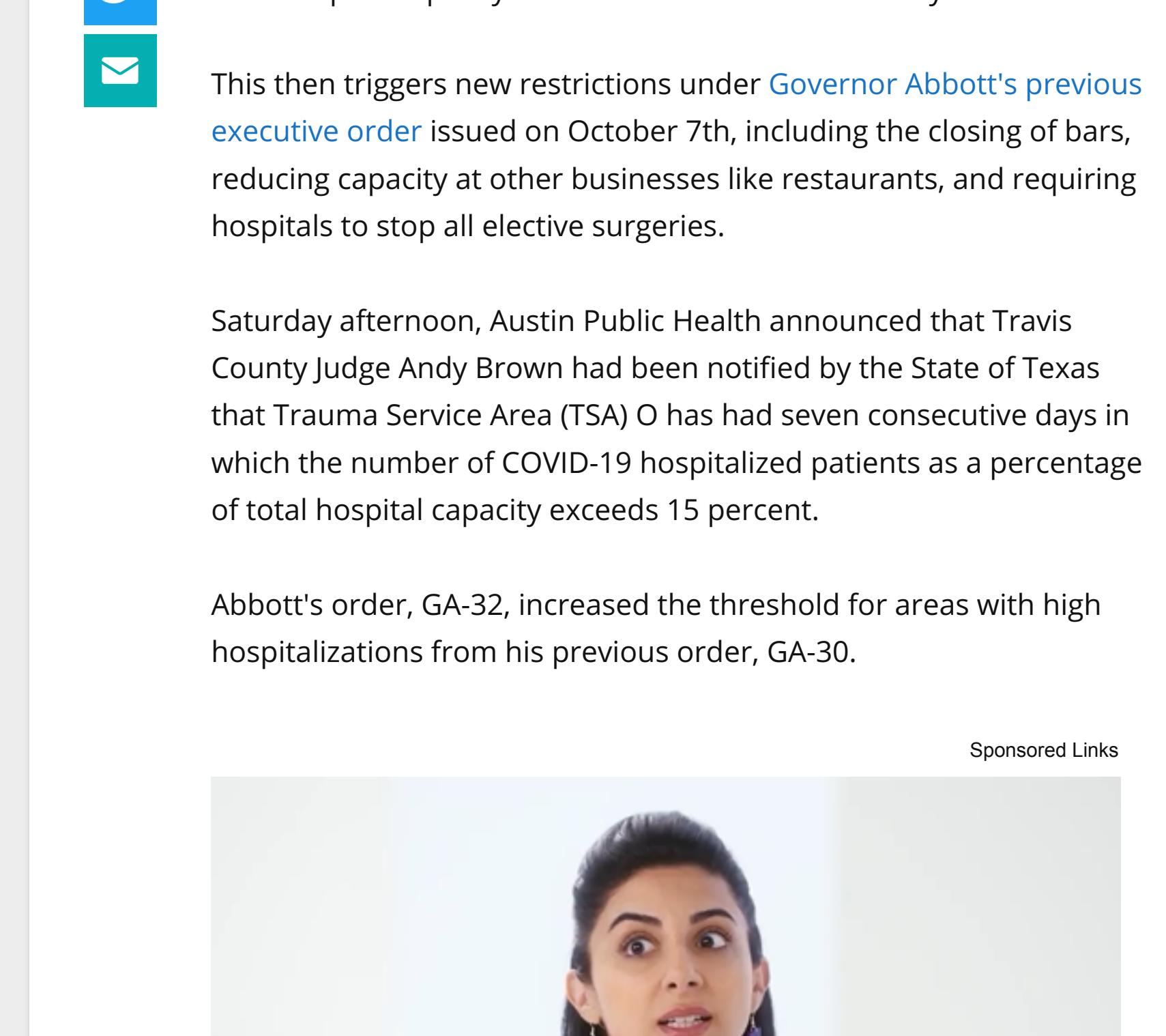
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Austin area surpasses threshold to roll back business capacity, stop elective surgeries

by Rachel Bowman | Sunday, January 10th 2021



Sunday, the Austin Area passed the threshold in which the number of hospitalized COVID-19 patients exceeds 15 percent of the total hospital capacity for the seventh consecutive day. (Photo: CBS Austin)

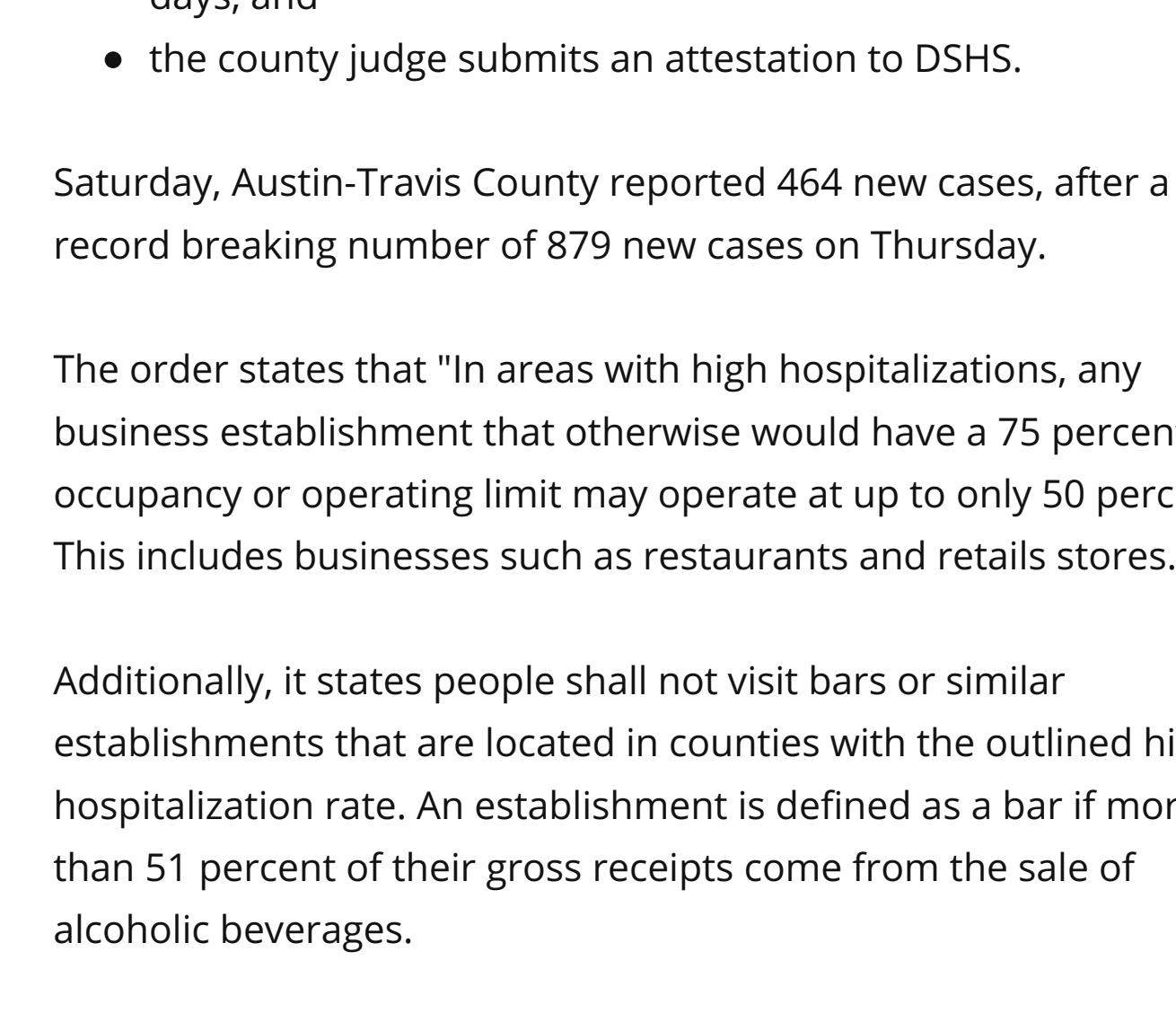
[f](#) Sunday, the Austin Area surpassed the threshold in which the number of hospitalized COVID-19 patients exceeds 15 percent of the total hospital capacity for the seventh consecutive day.

[t](#) [e](#) This then triggers new restrictions under [Governor Abbott's previous executive order](#) issued on October 7th, including the closing of bars, reducing capacity at other businesses like restaurants, and requiring hospitals to stop all elective surgeries.

Saturday afternoon, Austin Public Health announced that Travis County Judge Andy Brown had been notified by the State of Texas that Trauma Service Area (TSA) O has had seven consecutive days in which the number of COVID-19 hospitalized patients as a percentage of total hospital capacity exceeds 15 percent.

Abbott's order, GA-32, increased the threshold for areas with high hospitalizations from his previous order, GA-30.

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In the new order, the new definition of areas with high hospitalizations is any Trauma Service Area (or TSA) that has had seven consecutive days in which the number of COVID-19 hospitalized patients exceeds 15 percent of the total hospital capacity.

Likewise, TSA's will no longer qualify as having high hospitalizations when the area has had seven consecutive days in which the number of COVID-19 hospitalized patients is 15 percent or less of the total hospital capacity.

The Austin area is a part of TSA O, which includes the following counties:

- Bastrop
- Blanco
- Burnet
- Caldwell
- Fayette
- Hays
- Lee
- Llano
- San Saba
- Travis
- Williamson

Exceptions in the order allows counties in TSAs with high hospitalizations to choose to operate at 75 percent capacity if:

- the county has fewer than 30 cases reported over the last 14 days, and
- the county judge submits an attestation to DSHS.

Saturday, Austin-Travis County reported 464 new cases, after a record breaking number of 879 new cases on Thursday.

The order states that "In areas with high hospitalizations, any business establishment that otherwise would have a 75 percent occupancy or operating limit may operate at up to only 50 percent." This includes businesses such as restaurants and retail stores.

Additionally, it states people shall not visit bars or similar establishments that are located in counties with the outlined high hospitalization rate. An establishment is defined as a bar if more than 51 percent of their gross receipts come from the sale of alcoholic beverages.

However, there are some exceptions to this rule.

According to the order, there is no occupancy limit for outdoor areas, events, and establishments, excluding the following:

- Amusement parks
- Water parks
- Swimming pools
- Museums and libraries
- Zoos, aquariums, natural caverns, and similar facilities

These listings must now adhere to a 50% capacity of normal operating limits due to TSA O now being categorized as a high hospitalization area.

The order also prohibits outdoor gatherings exceeding 10 people unless otherwise approved by a mayor or county judge.

Hospitals will also now be required to stop all elective surgeries.

Said Dr. Mark Escott, Interim Austin-Travis County Health Authority,

"We are incredibly concerned that our area has hit the hospitalization rate which has resulted in the rollback on the occupancy of businesses. The projections have been concerning for some time, and this is just the latest reminder that Austin-Travis County is experiencing a deadly surge in cases as a result of holiday gatherings and gatherings thereafter. The additional restrictions placed by GA 32 alone, though, will not be enough to counterbalance this surge in cases and hospitalizations. In other jurisdictions that hit this point prior to the Austin area, cases and hospitalizations continue their uncontrolled rise. Dallas/Fort Worth is at 27%, San Antonio at 22%, and Houston at almost 20% and all three continue to rise. We need every person in this community to understand that exceeding our hospital capacity is now inevitable, but how far we exceed that capacity depends on all of us. Today is the day to decide to stay home and reduce risk to save our hospitals and save lives."

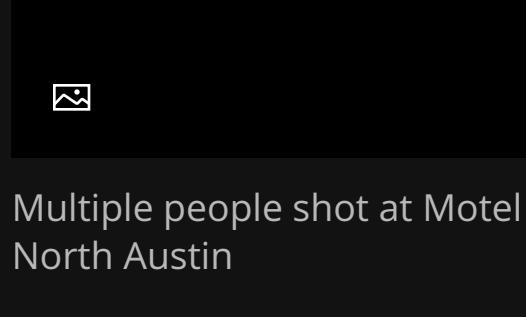
This announcement comes one day after Austin-Travis County announced the beginning of the activation process for the Alternate Care Site (ACS). The ACS will be activated to take specific COVID-19 low-acuity patients to help relieve stress on local hospitals.

Austin Public Health Director, Stephanie Hayden stated:

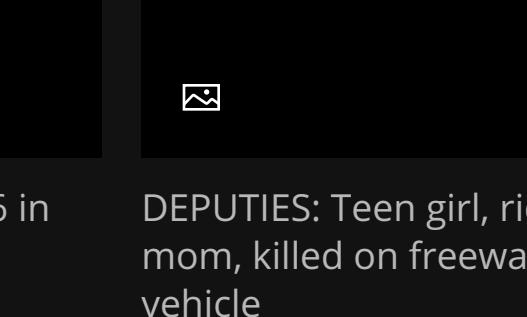
"It is critically important that everyone follow protective measures at this time," said Stephanie Hayden, Austin Public Health Director. "Wearing a mask, washing your hands, watching your distance, and avoiding gatherings have been lifesaving measures throughout this pandemic. We will not be able to vaccinate or enforce our way out of the surge already happening, so we need to take it upon ourselves to protect our community."

Austin-Travis County is currently in a Stage 5 Risk Level for COVID-19. As of Saturday, 555 people in the county are hospitalized, with 162 in the ICU and 101 on ventilators.

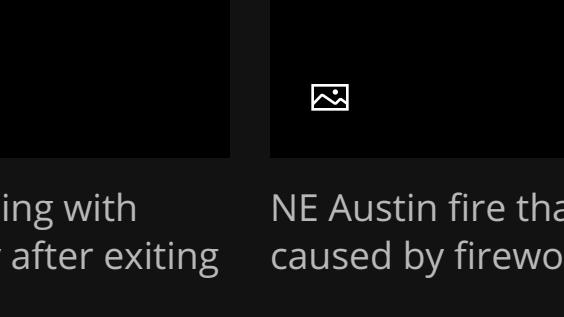
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