



Written by [Dennis Behrendt](#) on July 16, 2020

Florida Labs “Forget” to Include Negative COVID Test Results

It is reasonable to think that labs reporting test results for COVID-19 tests would report both positive and negative results. After all, accurate data is important, isn't it?

Perhaps not in Florida. The *Orlando Sentinel* has matter-of-factly reported that some labs were simply failing to report negative test results.

“Several lab companies that process coronavirus tests from Florida have reported incomplete data to the state,” the *Sentinel* reported. The paper continued: “In some cases, labs reported positive test results, but did not report the number of negative test results.”



The consequences of this? [According to the *Sentinel*](#): “That has the potential to skew a key statistic known as the positivity rate or the percent of tests that are positive. That measure is often used by public health officials to determine how widespread infections are in a community.”

Strictly speaking, the *Sentinel* is perfectly accurate in its reporting on this topic. But, the paper is perilously close to misleading by omission by not admitting the true consequence of this “mistake.”

The fact is, by not bothering to report negative test results, the positivity rate is skewed to make the situation with the pandemic look more dire than it really is.

FOX 35 News, the local Fox News affiliate in Orlando, investigated the faulty laboratory results and turned up several disturbing details.

“Countless labs have reported a 100 percent positivity rate, which means every single person tested was positive,” FOX 35 News [reported](#). “Other labs had very high positivity rates. FOX 35 News found that testing sites like one local Centra Care reported that 83 people were tested and all tested positive. Then, NCF Diagnostics in Alachua reported 88 percent of tests were positive.”

The wildly incorrect numbers all ended up on a report from the Florida state Department of Health. How off-base were some of the stats?

The state report “showed that Orlando Health had a 98 percent positivity rate,” FOX 35 reported. “However, when FOX 35 News contacted the hospital, they confirmed errors in the report. Orlando Health’s positivity rate is only 9.4 percent, not 98 percent as in the report.”

Similarly, official figures showed that Orlando Veteran’s Medical Center had a 76 percent positivity rate. “A spokesperson for the VA told FOX 35 News on Tuesday that this does not reflect their numbers and that the positivity rate for the center is actually 6 percent.”

It seems incredible that multiple healthcare facilities and laboratories could make the same mistakes at



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the same time. But, that's where the state of Florida seems to be placing the blame so far. In a statement, the state said it was working to reeducate the labs. "As the state continues to receive results from various labs, the Department will continue educating these labs on proper protocol for reporting COVID-19 test results," a spokesperson for the Florida Department of Health said according to FOX 35.

[As for the much reported crisis in Florida](#) over the rapid rise in positive test results, new positives are down considerably since the biggest one day total of positives — 15,270 — was reported on July 11. New positives declined to 12,303 on July 12, and declined again to 9,258 on July 13 before rising slightly to 10,085 on July 14. Deaths, meanwhile, peaked at 82 on July 7 and have declined since, with 17 reported on July 14.

The Florida Agency for Health Care Administration also provides a dashboard showing high-level utilization of hospital resources. [According to that dashboard](#), Florida hospitals have a capacity of 48,004 beds, with 12,548 available as of July 15, meaning available capacity stands at 20.72 percent. The state also has 6,137 adult ICU beds and 603 pediatric ICU beds. As of July 15, 15.79 percent of adult ICU capacity is available and 40.13 percent of ICU capacity is available in the state according to the AHCA dashboard.

The AHCA dashboard, however, only represents a snapshot of bed availability and doesn't fully capture the reality that hospitals are able to adjust capacity to demand and can accommodate more when needed, a point acknowledged by the state.

"Hospitals have the ability to convert beds and bring additional ICU beds online in a surge situation when necessary," AHCA spokesman Patrick Manderfield [said in a statement](#) according to University of South Florida NPR station WUSF. "Within 48 hours, hospitals have the capability to dramatically increase statewide staffed capacity in the event of a surge situation."

This point was underscored by a spokesperson for Baycare Health System which operates a network of 15 hospitals.

"In almost all cases, hospitals' maximum capacity is greater than any day's staffed bed number and would be even greater still when the state allows hospitals to implement their approved surge response measures that can convert spaces for treating patients that are not normally used, such as a conference room," Baycare spokeswoman Vjollca Hysenlika said in a statement according to WUSF.

Lurid headlines notwithstanding, for now Florida hospitals appear to be capable of caring for the needs of COVID-19 patients. This was the message from AdventHealth CEO Terry Shaw. The leader of the large Florida hospital system discussed his hospitals' ability to serve his patients' needs during the coronavirus spike in an appearance on the CBS program Face the Nation.

"I'm thankful that we've had several months to learn how to treat the disease," Shaw said on the program. "We're much better prepared in July than we were in March. We have adequate personal protective equipment. We have a stockpile of ventilators, and we have an amazing clinical team that have taken best practices from around the globe and put them into our treatment protocols."

Discussing his organizations ability to respond to demand, he said: "One of the things that we did back in March was develop a program, a staff redeployment program, that allowed us to move critical resources around our organization, both within the state of Florida and then move people outside of the state of Florida or vice versa, based upon where spikes were coming and where people would be needed the most."



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He also reassured viewers that his hospitals had the ICU capacity needed.

“Our ICU capacities are running at about 85 to 90 percent, but we have the ability to turn some of our progressive care units into ICU units if we need to do so,” [he said](#).

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Dennis Behreandt is a research professional and writer, frequently covering subjects in history, theology, and science and technology. He has worked as an editor and publisher, and is a former managing editor of The New American.



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