

# ArMA President on Arizona's COVID-19 hotspot status: "We've been here before"

Eli Kirshbaum | Jan 7, 2021

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Lowering Arizona's [record-breaking](#) COVID-19 infection levels will require a balance of strong leadership and personal responsibility, according to the President of the Arizona Medical Association Ross Goldberg, MD. Arizona has the highest COVID-19 [infection rate](#) in the U.S. and was recently called a "global hotspot" by health experts. Goldberg acknowledged that the state's leadership plays a key role in preventing the spread of the virus, but said individual negligence of public health advisories is a driving factor.

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“It's very frustrating that we are asking people just to follow some simple guidelines, and many people just don't want to anymore, and that is putting an incessant strain on our resources,” Goldberg said. “I'm not sure how we overcome that. It's a very frustrating experience.”

Arizona has a [total](#) of 584,598 confirmed cases and 9,741 deaths. There were 17,234 new cases reported on Jan. 3rd alone, and 290 [new](#) deaths reported on Jan 5th alone. While every county besides Greenlee County is currently experiencing significant outbreaks, La Paz and Yuma counties have a particularly high case rate.

Goldberg referenced Arizona's COVID-19 infection levels [last summer](#), noting this is not the first time the state has been a global hotspot.

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“I remember back in July when we were the worst place on the planet — literally,” he said. “So I know what it’s like to literally work in the worst place on the planet, and it’s disappointing that we’re back there again. It’s really the case rate that’s driving it, which is frustrating because there are a lot of factors that went into this, and we haven’t even really seen the surge yet from Christmas and New Years.”

He points to the politicization of basic measures like mask wearing as a reason Arizonans have not responded adequately enough to contain the virus. Individual responsibility is a big factor in the state’s response, he said.

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“It doesn’t make people happy to hear that you have to be responsible for yourself,” he said. “When you hear politicians talking about health care, you don’t really hear them talking about personal responsibility, right? Because it doesn’t help them get elected. My role as a physician isn’t to tell you what you want to hear, it’s what you need to hear.”

“If people don’t do that, we don’t get ahead of this thing and slow it down,” he said. “It’s the physical distancing, it’s the hand-washing, it’s doing everything, like we asked, to slow the spread of this virus.”

Goldberg also said it’s important to balance COVID-19-based executive decisions, such as closing down restaurants, with economic considerations.

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“Leadership obviously has to be adaptable and flexible, depending on what the numbers are saying,” he said. “But I will also say, and people don’t like to hear this, but I will also recognize the fact that the economy is not an independent entity. The economy and public health are linked, and you can’t just shut everything down and expect everything to be okay if you cut away financial resources from people.”

A spokesperson from the Gov. Doug Ducey’s office [acknowledged](#) the seriousness of the outbreak but said other states with stricter public health measures have had similar problems. According to Goldberg, it is a complicated issue that there is no clear answer for. He said Arizona enforced stricter measures earlier in the pandemic but still ended up at current levels, and believes forcing safety measures onto Arizonans is not a sustainable solution.



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“If you’re going to force people to do it, they’re not going to react so well to it, and they’ll probably go out of their way to defy it,” he said. “So how do you find that balance? I don’t claim to have all of the answers, it’s very tricky. There are some people who want to lock everything down, others want to make it a free-for-all, and I don’t think either one of those is a good answer.”

It’s crucial to have a data-driven approach to the COVID-19 response, said Goldberg. He added that while there is “an end in sight” with vaccines beginning to roll out, it is imperative that people make responsible individual decisions in the next few months.

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