

COVID-19 in the U.S.

New cases plummet to lowest levels in a year

BY STEPHEN GROVES
Associated Press

New coronavirus cases across the United States have tumbled to rates not seen in more than 11 months, sparking optimism that vaccination campaigns are stemming both severe COVID-19 cases and the spread of the virus.

As cases, hospitalizations and deaths steadily dropped over the past week, pre-pandemic life in America has largely resumed. Hugs and unmasked crowds returned to the White House, a Mardi Gras-style parade marched through Alabama's port city of Mobile, and even states that have stuck to pandemic-related restrictions readied to drop them. However, health experts also cautioned that not enough Americans have been vaccinated to completely extinguish the virus, leaving the potential for new variants that could extend the pandemic.

As the seven-day average for new cases dropped below 30,000 per day over the week, Rochelle Walensky, the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, pointed out cases have not been this low since June 18. The average number of deaths over the last seven days also dropped to 552 — a rate not seen since July last year. It's a dramatic drop since



Eli Hartman/Odessa American

The 2021 graduating class of Odessa Career & Technical Early College High School listens as the salutatorian speaks during their graduation ceremony at Odessa College Sports Center in Odessa, Texas, on Friday.

the pandemic hit a devastating crescendo in January.

"As each week passes and as we continue to see progress, these data give me hope," Walensky said Friday at a news conference.

Health experts credit an efficient rollout of vaccines for the turnaround. More than 60% of people over 18 have received at least one shot, and almost half are fully vaccinated, according to the CDC. But demand for vaccines has dropped across

much of the country. President Joe Biden's administration is trying to convince other Americans to sign up for shots, using an upbeat message that vaccines offer a return to normal life.

White House health officials on Friday even waded into offering dating advice. They are teaming up with dating apps to offer a new reason to "swipe right" by featuring vaccination badges on profiles and in-app bonuses for people who have

gotten their shots.

Ohio, New York, Oregon and other states are enticing people to get vaccinated through lottery prizes of up to \$5 million.

Virgin Galactic rocket ship ascends from New Mexico

BY MORGAN LEE
Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. — Virgin Galactic on Saturday made its first rocket-powered flight from New Mexico to the fringe of space in a manned shuttle, as the company forges toward offering tourist flights to the edge of the Earth's atmosphere.

High above the desert in a cloudless sky, VSS Unity ignited its rocket to hurtle the ship and two pilots toward space. A live feed by NASASpaceFlight.com showed the ship accelerating upward and confirmed a landing later via radar.

Virgin Galactic announced that its VSS Unity shuttle achieved a speed equal to three times the speed of sound and an altitude of just over 55 miles above sea level before making its gliding return through the atmosphere.

British billionaire and Virgin Galactic founder Sir Richard Branson says the flight and landing bring the roughly 15-year-old venture tantalizingly close to commercial flights for tourists. Virgin Galactic says those flights could begin next year.



Virgin Galactic's VSS Unity departs Mojave Air & Space Port in California in February for the final time as Virgin Galactic shifts its SpaceFlight operations to New Mexico.
Matt Hartman/AP file

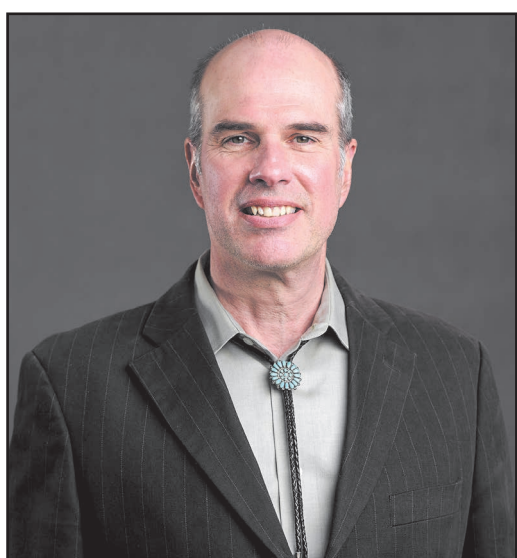
"Today was just an incredible step in the right direction," Branson told The Associated Press shortly after the flight landings. "It tested a lot of new systems that the teams have been building and they all worked."

Virgin Galactic CEO Michael Colglazier said at least two more undated test flights lie ahead — the next with four mission specialist passengers in the cabin. Pending trials also includes a flight that will take Branson to the edge of space.

"The flight today was elegant, beautiful," Colglazier said. Virgin Galactic said the flight provided an assessment of upgrades to a horizontal stabilizer, other flight controls and a suite of cabin cameras de-

signed to provide live images of flight to people on the ground. The shuttle also carried a scientific payload in cooperation with NASA's Flight Opportunities Program.

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- Nathan Hovekamp

Ask a Beauty Professional



Owners Faces Etc. & Permanent Makeup
By Susan

Question: The older I get, the smaller my mouth seems to be (although my husband would disagree!). I am considering having fillers injected to enhance my lips. I understand it is not a long-term solution. Is permanent make up a good alternative?

Answer: Permanent make up is an excellent alternative to enhance your lips and make them look fuller. Lip liner or full lip color can reshape your lips. Lip liner alone coupled with your lipstick or gloss, will keep your color from bleeding into the surrounding skin. It can even diminish the appearance of age lines around the lips. Full lip color eliminates the chore of always applying lipstick, Especially after eating or kissing! Just like cosmetic stores, multiple colors are available from subtle to dramatic. The results will far outweigh fillers and last much longer.

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HYDRAFACIAL V. MICRODERM



Kelly White
Advanced Aesthetician

Question: Is a HydraFacial better than a Microdermabrasion facial?

Answer: Both HydraFacial and Microdermabrasion exfoliates the skin; however, a HydraFacial treatment delivers you a more customized experience. The hydration aspect of a HydraFacial provides deep penetration

of specially formulated serums that effectively target skin concerns. In addition, the innovative Vortex-Fusion tip of the HydraFacial thoroughly removes excess sebum and impurities, and you can actually see the impurities removed from your skin at the end of your treatment. Both can help brighten the skin and improve its texture and smoothness. However, combined with their potent serums, a HydraFacial treatment can also plump skin and reduce fine lines and wrinkles, and address pigmentation and acne concerns - with no downtime. Plus, HydraFacial treatments result in an immediate and noticeable improvement in skin tone and texture! With regular HydraFacial treatments, you can enjoy significant and long-lasting results that keep your skin "red carpet ready" at all times! Clear out the gunk and get your glow! Save with monthly memberships. Call today to schedule your HydraFacial experience.

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