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Live Tracker of COVID-19 Cases and Deaths by U.S. Congressional Districts Released

The Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies, Harvard Center for Geographic Analysis at the Institute for Quantitative Social Science, and Microsoft AI for Health release the first COVID-19 live tracker for U.S. congressional districts to guide elected representatives and the public to fight the pandemic.

For immediate release: Friday, November 20, 2020

Cambridge, MA – Researchers at the Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies, Harvard Center for Geographic Analysis at the Institute for Quantitative Social Science, and Microsoft AI for Health have joined forces to create a COVID-19 live tracker that monitors the current status of COVID-19 cases and deaths, as well as the reduction of new cases in U.S. congressional districts. This is the first compilation of this important data, which could be key for elected officials and their constituents to monitor and develop testing strategies, vaccine deployment strategies, and other measures to enable their districts to open safely.

"The research provides critical insight not previously available into how this pandemic is impacting different congressional districts across the U.S.," said Nydia M. Velázquez, Representative and Chair of the Committee on Small Business, and Congresswoman of New York's 7th Congressional District. "Because of this information, the House Small Business Committee can better examine the efficacy of federal programs in reaching the areas most impacted by this virus. Data like this is critical to policymakers as it improves our ability to legislate changes that ensure aid is going to those that need it most."

Nearly a year into the global pandemic, data on COVID-19 for U.S. congressional districts have not been readily available. S. V. Subramanian and researchers in the Geographic Insights Lab, who had previously applied a geographical method to convert county-level opioid prescriptions data to the congressional district level, noticed that similar level data was lacking for the pandemic. The team developed COVID-19 metrics for U.S. congressional districts and, working with Wendy Guan from the Harvard Center for Geographic Analysis, developed a dashboard to share the data. John Kahan, the Vice President and Chief Data Analytics Officer at Microsoft, noted that the team's work was similar to a project underway at Microsoft, and the two groups joined forces to provide mutual scientific support, such as methodologies and data verification.

"We've heard from many Congressional members that they want to have a better understanding of the disease's spread in their districts, and so do their constituents, noted Kahan. "The data from this live COVID-19 tracker by congressional district will be key for policymakers to create policies to ensure safer communities, and allow the public to see the progress we are making together. AI for Health is proud to support this work."

Although elected representatives and their constituents may be well aware of the threat of COVID-19, it is the readily available and precise, quantifiable data that has been missing.

"By connecting the previously separate reporting geographies for public health and electoral data, this dataset represents an important effort by our Center for Geographic Analysis," said Gary King, director of the Institute for Quantitative Social Science, and Weatherhead University Professor at Harvard University. Douglas Richardson, Distinguished Researcher at Harvard Center for Geographic Analysis, and former Executive Director of the American Association of Geographers, underscored the importance of this effort: "As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to spiral out of control in the US (and elsewhere), innovations such as this which combine both science and public policy are sorely needed."

The live tracker contains the COVID-19 metrics for each congressional district, such as confirmed cases, deaths, cases and deaths per 100K/1M people, cumulative cases and deaths, and new cases and deaths. The tracker also provides the progress-to-zero metric to monitor progress on addressing the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We are proud to host such novel, real-time data on COVID-19 metrics that are crucial for elected officials to monitor their districts, and for American citizens to understand how their districts are faring and how the federal response matches their needs," said Mary C. Waters, interim director of the Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies, and John L. Loeb Professor of Sociology at Harvard University.

The Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies' mission is to improve well-being around the world by better understanding the interaction of demographic changes with social and economic development. A major goal of the Center is to produce population-based evidence that will better inform policies needed to create healthy and resilient societies.