



## COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR'S OFFICE

PIMA COUNTY GOVERNMENTAL CENTER  
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C.H. HUCKELBERRY  
County Administrator

July 28, 2020

To All Pima County School Superintendents

Re: **COVID-19 Back to School Process**

Dear Superintendents:

On July 24, 2020 a number of school superintendents met with myself, Deputy County Administrator and Chief Medical Officer Dr. Francisco Garcia as well as Public Health Director Dr. Theresa Cullen and the Pima County Superintendent of Schools Dustin Williams to discuss a number of issues regarding the safe provision of school services within your districts.

First, the Pima County Health Department will provide appropriate County level public health metrics to help guide the resumption of school related activities. These metrics will use established public health data, facts and standards. The guiding principle of our public health agency has been and will continue to be to protect the health and welfare of teachers, staff and students when considering school related activities.

### **Governor Executive Order 2020-51 Arizona: Open for Learning dated July 23, 2020**

As you know, while we have been assisting in the development of appropriate guidelines and processes to bring students, teachers and staff back to a school environment in a safe manner, it was only Thursday July 23, 2020 that during the Governor's press conference, we learned that County public health agencies would be relied upon to assist and provide more specific guidance for reopening. Please see the following highlights from Executive Order 2020-51:

"1. The Arizona Department of Health Services shall develop public health benchmarks for the safe return of in-person teacher-led classroom instruction, and make them available no later than August 7, 2020."

"a. Each school district and charter school shall consider these recommendations, guidance from county health officials..."

"3. Each school district and charter school shall begin offering free on-site learning opportunities and support services for students who need a place to go during the day as required by Executive Order 2020-41 and shall begin August 17, 2020, as prescribed in Executive Order 2020-44."

"d. A school district or charter school may apply to the Arizona Department of Education for a waiver of the requirement under Executive Order 2020-41 to provide free on-site learning if a county health department, in conjunction with the Arizona Department of Health Services, advises closing an entire school district or charter school due to an outbreak of the virus, or a tribal sovereign nation issues a "stay-at-home" impacting a school district or charter school on or adjacent to a reservation."

Clearly, County public health agencies with real time information and data regarding the pandemic are in the best position to offer public health advice regarding school activities related to managing the spread of COVID-19.

We have also been working with local area school superintendents to develop specific guidance consistent with public health standards and how to incorporate the guidance that was recently issued by the Center for Disease Control (CDC). As you probably know, school guidance from the CDC was just revised again last week, making this guidance a moving target. We believe it is appropriate to have guidance consistent with that issued by the CDC as well as the State, but also adapted to local conditions.

### **Where we Stand Today Regarding Infection, Hospitalization and Death Statistics for Resumption of Activities, Including Opening Schools**

Could local public health data support the reopening of schools on August 17, 2020 for traditional face-to-face, in-person learning? The short answer is, no. The explanation lies in the facts. They are:

- We are now near the end of July and local County COVID-19 infections are at the highest daily amounts since the pandemic began.
- Pima County's total monthly infections in March were 153, in April 1,024, in May 1,101, in June 5,622 and so far for July through the 27<sup>th</sup>, they are 6,722.
- Countywide transmission rates remain above 11 percent, with a World Health Organization (WHO) recommendation that rates be below 5 percent prior to opening.
- Masks were only recently mandated at the County level on June 19, 2020 and it will take six weeks to see if this mitigation strategy is working.
- Hospitalizations for COVID-19 are at record levels and it was only last week the ICU bed capacity was nearly exceeded and critical patients were transferred to other hospitals within the State.
- Widespread testing is now only becoming available throughout the community.

- Despite the availability of widespread testing, obtaining test results in a timely manner to allow effective contact tracing does not exist at this time in our communities.

For all of the above reasons, schools should not open on August 17, 2020 for traditional face-to-face, in-person instruction.

The present data certainly does not yet provide a positive, sustainable trend. Hence, it is the professional opinion of Dr. Garcia and Dr. Cullen that the earliest that traditional face-to-face in-person instruction can be anticipated to resume is after Labor Day (September 7, 2020) or later (e.g. October 5, 2020). Such recommendation would not prohibit schools from specifically opening facilities for at-risk youth on a limited basis as envisioned in the Governor's latest executive order, provided all safety criterion are followed such as wellness checks, wearing of masks, physical distancing and disinfection protocols.

This same logic would also apply to interscholastic athletic and other extracurricular activities. In fact, due to the contact nature of many interscholastic sports, our health professionals would advise shifting Fall 2020 sports to Spring 2021. Those sports and other activities that can be safely conducted using masks and distancing may take place, but otherwise schools should plan that return to normal play should not be considered until after face-to-face in-person learning resumes.

### **What Indicators will Indicate When it is Safe to Return to In-Person Learning**

Our Public Health agency develops and publicizes on our COVID-19 webpage, *The Pima County Progress Report*. It consists of a number of known public health metrics and is color coded similar to a traffic signal. It has nine criteria; today six are red, which means stop. As conditions improve, these areas will transition to yellow, which means caution and finally green, which simply means go. This progress report, coupled with guidance from the Arizona Department of Health Services (AzDHS), should be a valuable tool in determining when and how to implement specific decisions regarding in-person learning.

### **What Data Do We Have To Assist in Determining the State of Community COVID-19 Infection?**

The County Public Health agency has an epidemiology unit that collects extensive data sets with regard to COVID-19 pandemics. I am providing you with several charts that will give you an idea of the information we have, all of which is available to you. One chart shows the infections by morbidity and mortality week, with the week specified at the bottom of the chart. This simply shows the weekly growth in COVID-19 infection cases Pima County. Always discount the last three weeks as there are substantial and significant revisions upward based on data. Another chart shows age distribution of those infected. As you can see, the largest number of infections occur in the age group of 20 to 24. The school age children which you are most interested, shows lower infections with the lowest in the

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elementary school aged children. Also included are charts related to ethnicity, age, hospitalizations and deaths.

In addition, we are able to map the location of infections through our geographic information system. This information is obviously also available to you for your use. It will be plotted by school district; however, this may be of limited value since most school districts accept students from outside their district boundaries.

### **How we will be able to Support School Districts - Testing, Timely Results and Contact Tracing**

The County has recently opened a COVID-19 regional testing facility at the Kino Event Center. We are in the process of opening two additional testing sites, Ellie Town Flowing Wells Community Center and the Udall Center. These sites will provide free COVID-19 testing for anyone who is COVID-19 symptomatic, asymptomatic or anyone who believes they may have been exposed to COVID-19. We have also endeavored to utilize laboratories that provide rapid test results. COVID-19 positive results are directly linked to the County contact tracing program. By utilizing COVID-19 regional testing sites, rapid results and contact tracing, we have the best opportunity to contain the spread of COVID-19. We are also working with the Arizona Department of Emergency Management to develop a number of drive through testing sites throughout Pima County.

These facilities will be available to school districts, their faculty, staff as well as students and their families. We will explore making blocks of time for school district personnel to be tested on Thursdays or Fridays. With test results will be desired by the following Monday so those who test negative may immediately return to work.

For any positive COVID-19 case in a school environment, the public health agency has established procedures for follow up testing and contact tracing to isolate the infection and keep it from spreading to others in the school environment.

### **Addition of Back to School Committee of the Back to Business Task Force**

To assist in gaining consensus on school district actions related to COVID-19, the County will be adding a Back to School Subcommittee to our Back to Business Task Force. This subcommittee will be made up of all of the public school superintendents and a number of principals from public charter schools within Pima County. Their charge will be to develop local standards through a collaborative process for managing COVID-19 and school activities. This process will help us achieve such a goal. This is particularly important since by the recent Governor Executive Order, County public health officials will be relied on to provide guidance on opening schools. These efforts must focus on the best available public health science and standards to safely reactivate school environments for traditional in-person face-to-face instruction.

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In the recent past, we have successfully developed public health standards and guidelines for the reopening of restaurants and other businesses. The guidelines and requirements reflect the best public health standards to safely reopen. Those businesses and restaurants that conform to our standards are awarded a Ready for You Award from the County's public health agency. For schools that adopt and demonstrate conformance with the standards that will be agreed upon for the reopening of schools, they will be awarded a Ready to Learn Award.

### **Building Community Support**

It is very important that community trust be built regarding the safety of our public schools. This trust in part can be gained by the adoption of public health driven metrics regarding reopening or expanding school activities, identifying, isolating, treating and contact tracing any COVID-19 infection that occurs within the school environment, which there will inevitably be.

As the County public health agency, we are fully prepared to support our public schools as you navigate this COVID-19 pandemic. To this end, I have designated two of my key staff to help school districts interface with our public health agency. My Executive Assistant Nicole Fyffe (520.724.8149) and Special Projects Manager Diana Durazo (520.724.8801) will assist district officials in getting needed answers to questions or resolving public health related issues.

Sincerely,

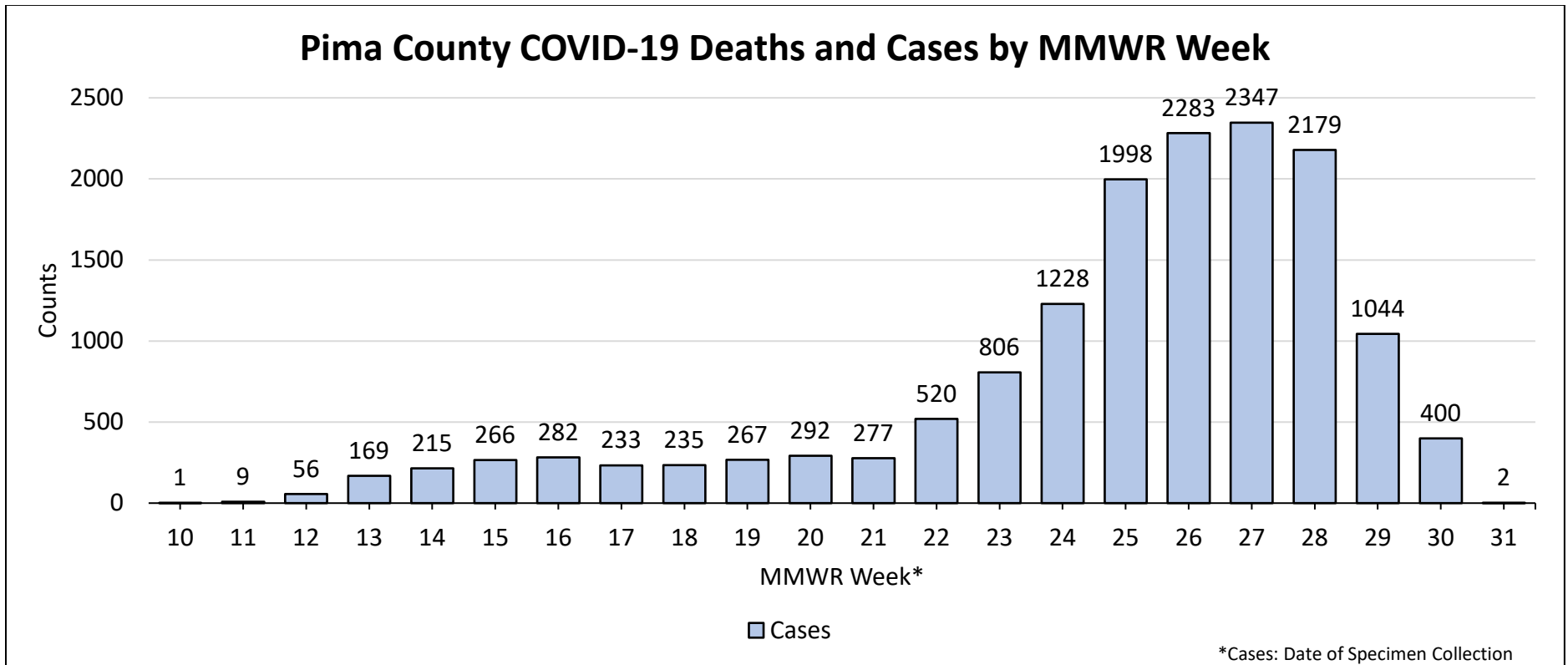
  
C.H. Huckelberry  
County Administrator

Enclosures

c: The Honorable Chairman and Members, Pima County Board of Supervisors  
Jan Leshner, Chief Deputy County Administrator  
Francisco Garcia, MD, MPH, Deputy County Administrator & Chief Medical Officer,  
Health and Community Services  
Terry Cullen, MD, MS, Public Health Director, Pima County Health Department  
Nicole Fyffe, Executive Assistant to the County Administrator  
Diana Durazo, Special Projects Manager, Pima County Administrator's Office



## Pima County COVID-19 Cases and Hospitalizations Report

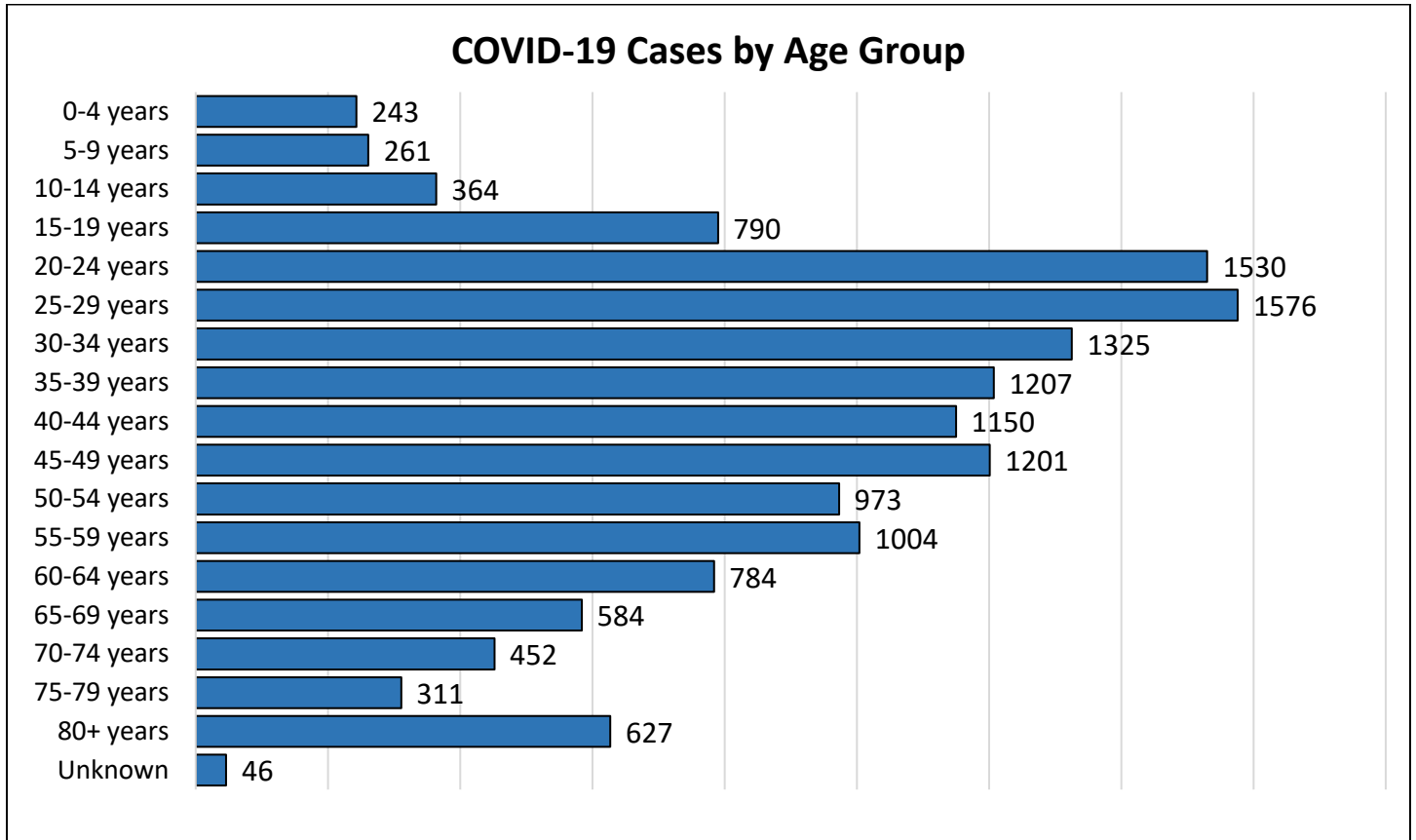


**Week 10:** 3/1/20-3/7/20 — **Week 11:** 3/8/20-3/14/20 — **Week 12:** 3/15/20-3/21/20 — **Week 13:** 3/22/20-3/28/20 — **Week 14:** 3/29/20-4/4/20—**Week 15:** 4/5/20-4/11/20 —**Week 16:** 4/12/20-4/17/20 — **Week 17:** 4/19/20-4/25/20 — **Week 18:** 4/26/20-5/2/20—**Week 19:** 5/3/20-5/9/20—**Week 20:** 5/10/20-5/16/20—**Week 21:** 5/17/20-5/23/20—**Week 22:** 5/24/20-5/30/20—**Week 23:** 5/31/20-6/6/20—**Week 24:** 6/7/20-6/13/20—**Week 25:** 6/14/20-6/20/20 — **Week 26:** 6/21/20 – 6/27/20 -- **Week 27:** 6/28/20-7/4/20 – **Week 28:** 7/5/20 – 7/11/20 – **Week 29:** 7/12/20-7/18/20 – **Week 30:** 7/19/20 – 7/25/20 **Week 31:** 7/26/20 -- 8/1/20



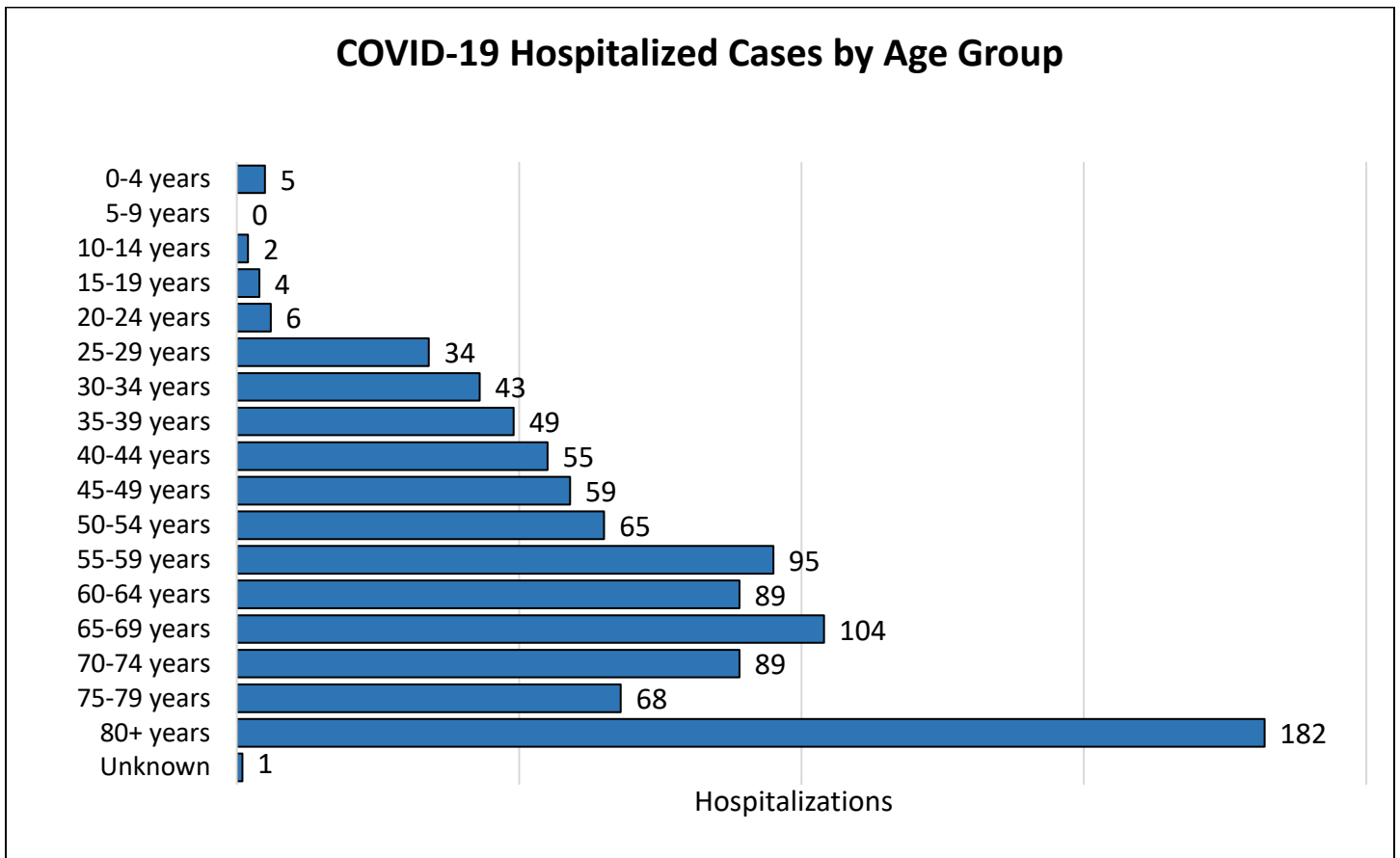
## Pima County COVID-19 Age Groups by Cases, Hospitalizations, and Deaths\*

### 5 Year Age Break Down of COVID-19 Cases



\*From March 4, 2020 to present

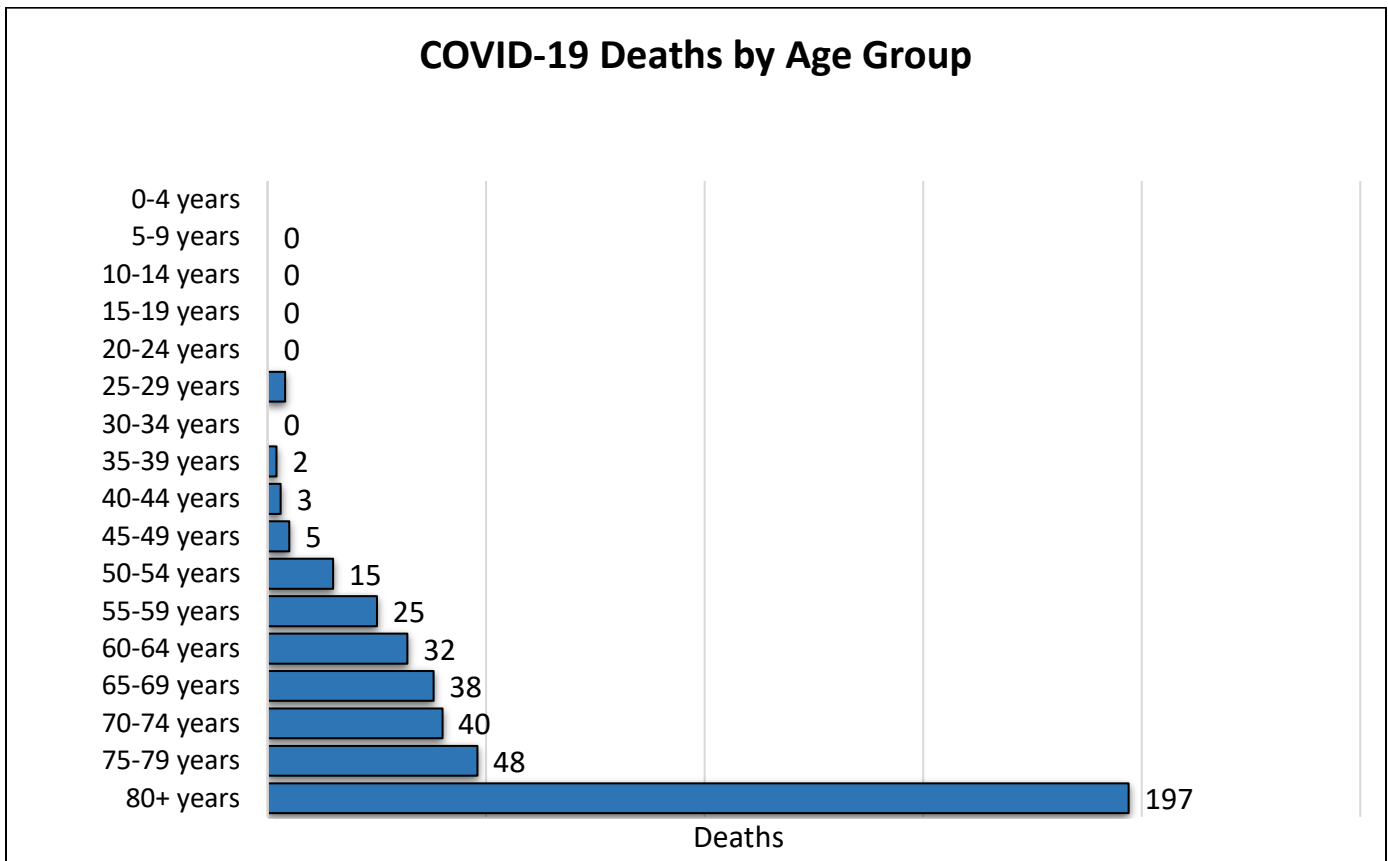
## 5 Year Age Break Down of Hospitalized COVID-19 Cases\*



\*From March 4, 2020 to present



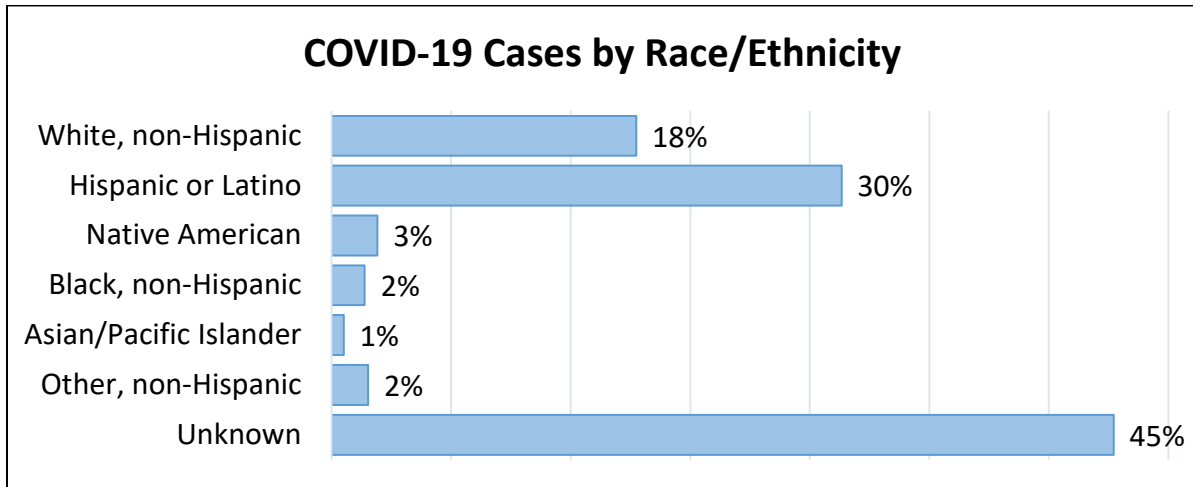
## 5 Year Age Break Down of COVID-19 Deaths\*



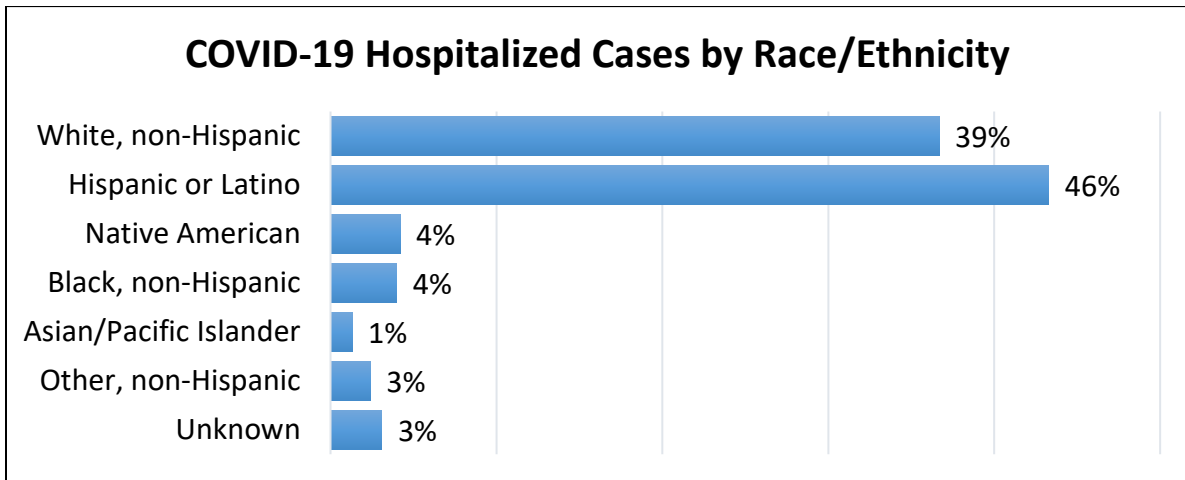
\*From March 4, 2020 to present

## Pima County COVID-19 Demographics\*

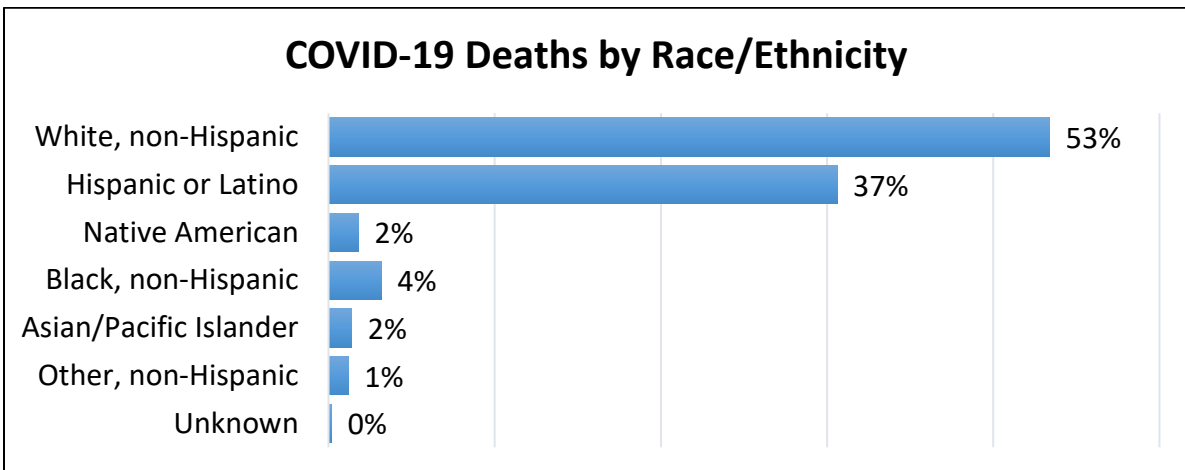
### Demographics of COVID-19 Cases



### Demographics of Hospitalized COVID-19 Cases



### Demographics of COVID-19 Deaths



\*From March 4, 2020 to July 24, 2020

Updated: 7/24/2020