COVID-19 UPDATE: Gov. Justice, State health experts urge extra caution as cases increase nationwide and colder weather approaches

10/23/2020

CHARLESTON, WV – Gov. Jim Justice joined West Virginia health leaders and other officials today for his latest daily press briefing regarding the State's COVID-19 response.

GOVERNOR, STATE HEALTH EXPERTS URGING EXTRA CAUTION AS CASES INCREASE NATIONWIDE

During Friday's briefing, Gov. Justice joined State health experts in urging all West Virginians to redouble their efforts to follow the best practices recommended by health professionals regarding COVID-19, as case numbers increase nationwide ahead of the upcoming winter months.

"We cannot drop our guard," Gov. Justice said. "I know everybody is getting tired of wearing a mask and following all of the guidelines. But we need to really stay on top of it and take care of ourselves."

Click here to view photo album

(https://www.flickr.com/photos/govjustice/albums/72157716586757672)

"When we look around the country, we see the number of cases is picking up," West Virginia Coronavirus Czar Dr. Clay Marsh said. "Yesterday we had 71,000 positive cases in the United States, which is a three-month high.

"It's time for each person in our state to make a renewed commitment to do the things that can protect them and protect each other, and that's really the way we're going to get through the next six to 12 weeks, which many people project is going to be the worst part of the virus that we've seen," Dr. Marsh continued. "I'm not saying that to scare people, but I want to make people aware that whatever we do today is going to really be felt a couple weeks from now and a month from now.

"So today, West Virginia, is really the time to be doubly committed to doing the right things; to get tested, to wear your masks, and keep a safe physical distance. Particularly as the weather gets colder, we need to avoid crowds and, if you're in an indoor place where people have their masks off, you need to be very, very cautious and six feet or more away from other people."

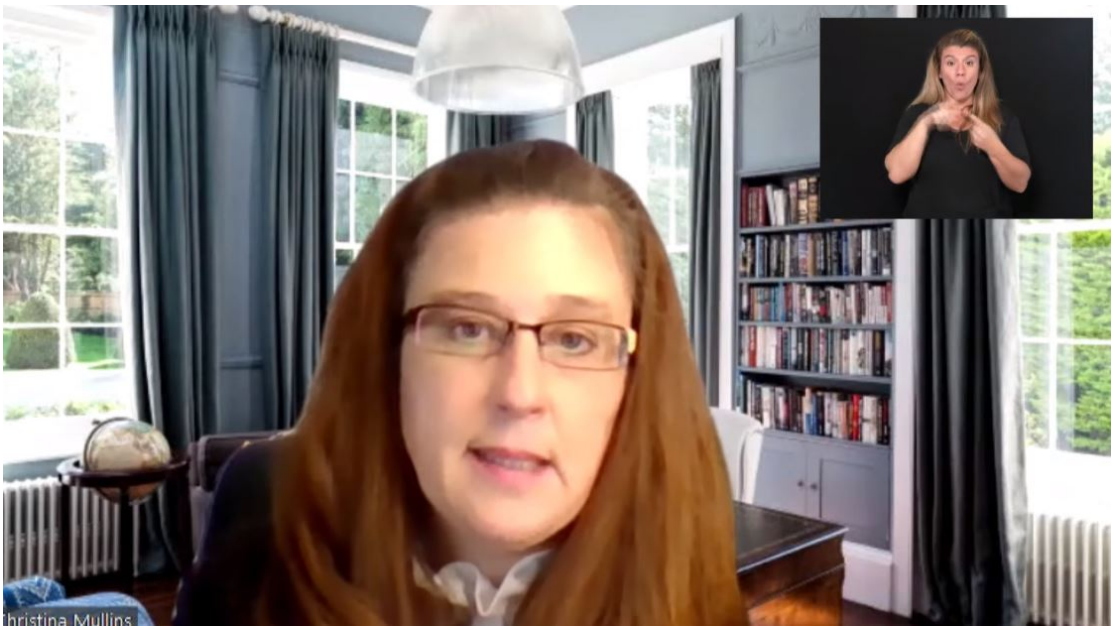
Dr. Marsh again reiterated the critical importance of wearing masks.

"It's projected by a University of Washington group that if we all wear masks consistently, we will save 100,000 lives by the end of the year," Dr. Marsh said. "It is in our power to protect ourselves and protect each other."

"Let me give you the equation that the great Doctor Clay Marsh has just given us, and really it's just as simple as mud West Virginia: masks equal vaccine," Gov. Justice said. "How can it be more simple? Today we don't have a vaccine, but wearing our masks is equal to a vaccine in a lot of ways because it's what we can do to stop the spread of this terrible disease."

Christina Mullens, Commissioner of the West Virginia DHHR's Bureau for Behavioral Health, also took part in today's briefing to discuss the importance of contact tracing in slowing the spread of COVID-19.

"Disease investigation and contact tracing are some of our most valuable public health tools and are established ways to prevent the spread of infectious disease," Mullens said. "You can help these efforts in a couple of ways. If you test positive, please respond to the contact tracers, provide accurate information, and isolate yourself from others. Also, if you see a call from your local health department, answer the phone, because you may be a close contact of someone who tested positive."



Mullens added that calls from the number 866-611-0661 or using the caller ID "WV COVID19 RESP" are legitimate and should always be answered.

"Contact tracing is a critical activity in protecting the lives and safety of our citizens, and you can help West Virginia remain strong throughout the COVID-19 pandemic," Mullens said.

Finally, Dr. Marsh also reiterated the importance of people taking advantage of the dozens of free testing sites established across West Virginia thanks to Gov. Justice's Aggressive Testing initiative.

"Our testing is a real cornerstone of identifying those people who can spread to others during the presymptomatic time," Dr. Marsh said. "So it's very important that all of our citizens go get tested. We've opened up that opportunity and that's a really good way that you can go make sure that not only you are protected, but also you're protecting others, including the people that you love."

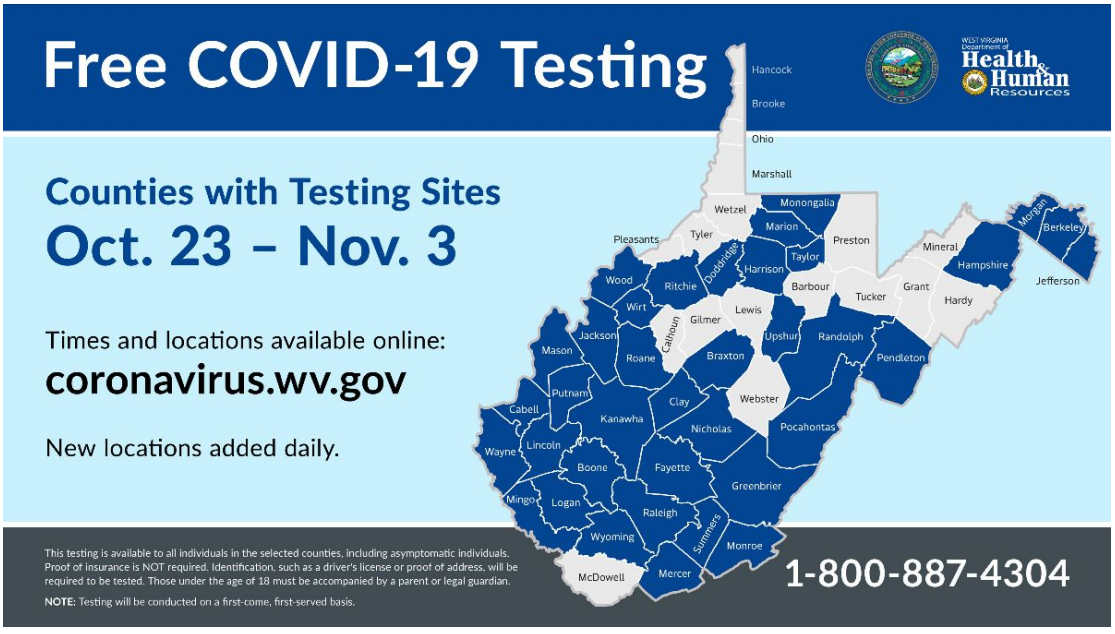
AGGRESSIVE TESTING CONTINUES ACROSS STATE

Also on Friday, Gov. Justice offered a reminder that free testing events are now scheduled over the coming weeks in 37 counties across West Virginia.

As part of the Governor's Aggressive Testing initiative, each county reaching Red or Orange status in the **DHHR's County Alert System map** (https://dhhr.wv.gov/COVID-19/Pages/default.aspx) **(Click "County Alert System" tab)** is required to set up at least one free testing site within the same day. Each county reaching Gold status is required to set up at least one free testing site within 48 hours. As of Friday, the only Red county was Wyoming County. Orange counties included Berkeley, Boone, Braxton, Doddridge, Mingo, Monroe, and Wayne counties. Gold counties included Jackson, Logan, Morgan, Pendleton, Webster, and Wirt counties.

This testing is available to all residents in selected counties, including asymptomatic individuals. Proof of insurance is not required. Attendees should bring identification, such as a driver's license or proof of address, to help in returning test results. Those under the age of 18 must be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian.

Click here to view all locations, dates, times and more details
(https://dhhr.wv.gov/COVID-19/pages/testing.aspx)



(https://dhhr.wv.gov/COVID-19/pages/testing.aspx)

Gov. Justice also offered a reminder that, as part of his administration's efforts to expand free COVID-19 testing throughout West Virginia, the State is now partnering with Walgreens and West Virginia-based company Fruth Pharmacy to offer dozens of new free testing sites at several of their pharmacy drive-thrus.

Walgreens is now offering free testing at 40 locations statewide, including several new testing sites. Locations include stores in Berkeley, Boone, Cabell, Clay, Fayette, Gilmer, Hampshire, Harrison, Jackson, Jefferson, Kanawha, Lincoln, Logan, Mercer, Monongalia, Nicholas, Pocahontas, Putnam, Raleigh, Summers, Wayne, and Wyoming counties.

Fruth Pharmacy is also offering free testing at 12 of their locations statewide, including stores in Cabell, Jackson, Kanawha, Mason, Putnam, Roane, and Wood counties.

Click here to find the testing location closest to you (https://dhhr.wv.gov/COVID-19/pages/testing.aspx)

(https://dhhr.wv.gov/COVID-19/pages/testing.aspx)

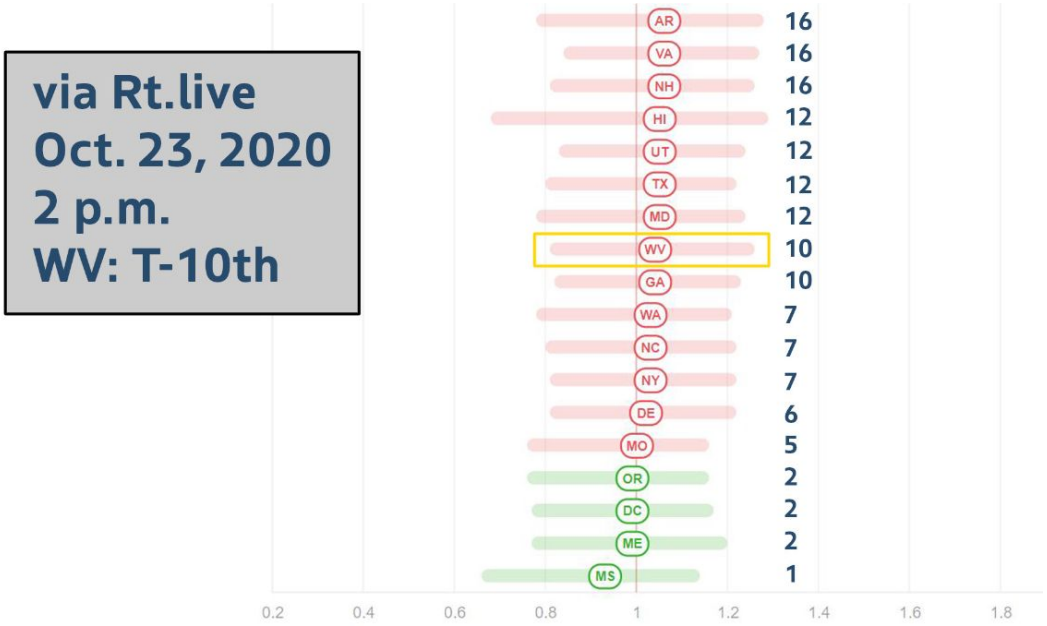
COVID-19 CASE NUMBERS UPDATE

Additionally Friday, Gov. Justice reported that the number of active COVID-19 cases across the state is now 4,602, down from 5,106 on Wednesday. However, the cumulative percent of positive cases increased slightly to 2.86 percent, up from 2.84 percent on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, West Virginia's statewide rate of COVID-19 transmission – also known as Rt – came in at 1.04 Friday afternoon. Despite being over the 1.00 threshold, that mark was still good enough to be tied for the **10th-best such rate** (https://rt.live/) of any state in the country.

West Virginia continues to outperform the national average – as well as the rates of all of its bordering states – in percentage of population positive, and percentage of positive test results.

Click here to view the latest COVID-19 data (https://dhhr.wv.gov/COVID-19/Pages/default.aspx)



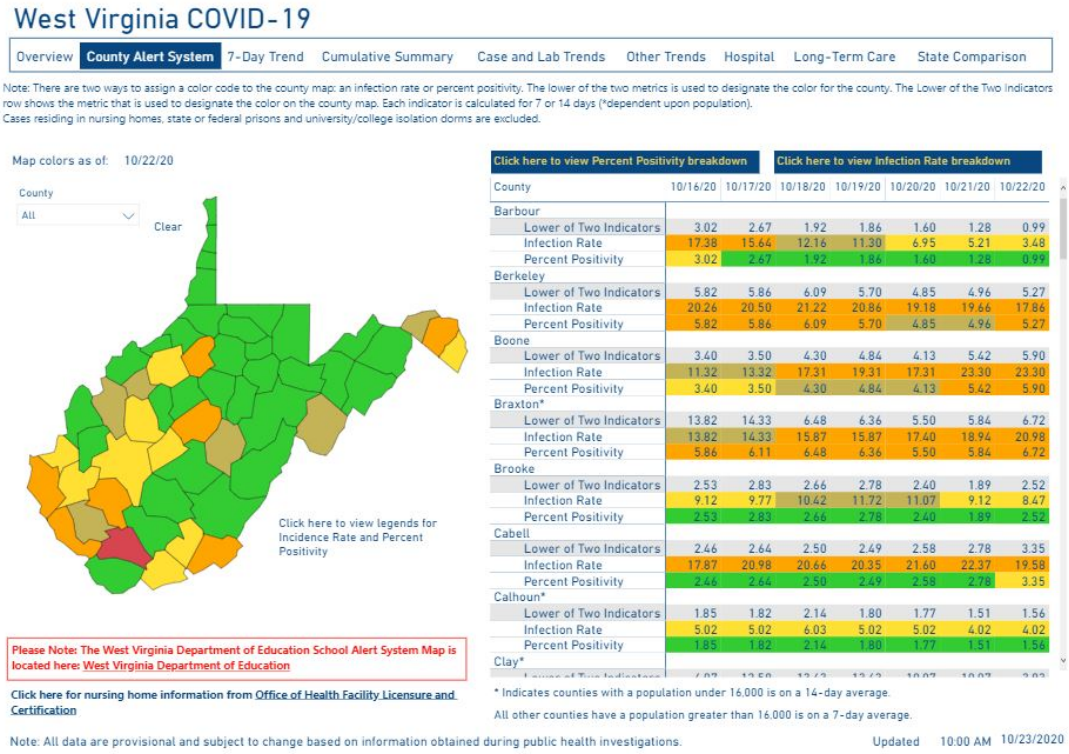
(https://rt.live/)

FRIDAY MAP UPDATE

Also on Friday, Gov. Justice provided a look at West Virginia's latest mid-week County Alert System map update.

Red counties: 1 (Wyoming)
Orange counties: 7 (Berkeley, Boone, Braxton, Doddridge, Mingo, Monroe, Wayne)
Gold counties: 6 (Jackson, Logan, Morgan, Pendleton, Webster, Wirt)
Yellow counties: 9 (Cabell, Clay, Jefferson, Kanawha, Lincoln, Mercer, Ritchie, Roane, Summers)
Green counties: 32 (All others)

The map is updated live on the **DHHR's COVID-19 Dashboard** (https://dhhr.wv.gov/COVID-19/Pages/default.aspx) **(Click "County Alert System" tab)** throughout the week for informational purposes and to provide an indication of how each county is trending ahead of each Saturday at 5 p.m.; the time when each county is assigned its official color designation for the next week, which determines the level of scholastic, athletic, and extracurricular activities permitted in each county for that particular week.



(https://dhhr.wv.gov/COVID-19/Pages/default.aspx)

OUTBREAK REPORT

Additionally Friday, Gov. Justice reported that, per the West Virginia Department of Education, there are 21 active outbreaks in public schools across the state. These outbreaks account for 72 confirmed cases.

Click here to view the WVDE's Current Outbreaks in Schools chart (https://wvde.us/schooloutbreaks)

There currently remain 14 active church-related outbreaks across 12 counties: Doddridge, Fayette, Mason, Mercer, Monroe, Nicholas, Putnam, Upshur, Wayne, Wetzel, Wood, and Wyoming counties.

The Governor reported there are now 45 outbreaks in long-term care facilities across the state, up from 43 on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, the Division of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DCR) is now reporting 13 active cases of COVID-19 among inmates across the state. There remain just seven active cases among DCR employees across West Virginia.

Click here to view the latest corrections facility update (https://dhhr.wv.gov/COVID-19/Pages/Correctional-Facilities.aspx)

$25 MILLION IN CARES ACT DOLLARS BEING PROVIDED TO HELP QUALIFYING WEST VIRGINIANS PAY UTILITY BILLS

Also on Friday, Gov. Justice provided a reminder that $25 million of CARES Act relief funds allocated to assist qualifying West Virginians pay their utility bills is being distributed across the state.

The money will go to local Public Service Districts so they can pass it along to customers.

Customers of electric, natural gas, water, and sewer utility companies who have experienced economic hardship and/or uncertainty resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, causing them to have unpaid utility bills from the period of March 1 – July 31 of this year, may receive financial assistance to pay those bills.

Qualifying customers will receive a letter and application in the mail. Customers must complete and return the application by Thursday, November 12, 2020.

"The bottom line is if you have an overdue utility bill from March 1 to July 31, if you will apply, it may very well be that your lingering, terrible bill gets eradicated because we just allocated $25 million to take care of that," Gov. Justice said. "It will help our utilities but it will also help West Virginians that are having a really tough go of it.

"So please apply and we'll try to get that taken care of and get you back in good shape," Gov. Justice continued.

GOV. JUSTICE AWARDS $17.3 MILLION IN VICTIMS OF CRIME ACT GRANTS

Additionally Friday, Gov. Justice took time out of his briefing to announce that he has awarded over $17.3 million in Victims of Crime Act Assistance (VOCA) sub-grant funds to 84 public and private non-profit agencies throughout the state.

"We need to help victims of violent crime in every way we possibly can," Gov. Justice said. "With the COVID-19 pandemic, we've seen a rise in the number of West Virginians using our nonprofit agencies for assistance. That's why they desperately need this funding, and why I am proud to get it to them today."

These funds will provide direct services, such as counseling, personal advocacy, court advocacy, client transportation, and support services to victims of crimes including domestic violence, sexual violence, child abuse, and elderly abuse.

The funds are provided by the U.S. Department of Justice and are administered by the West Virginia Division of Justice and Community Services.

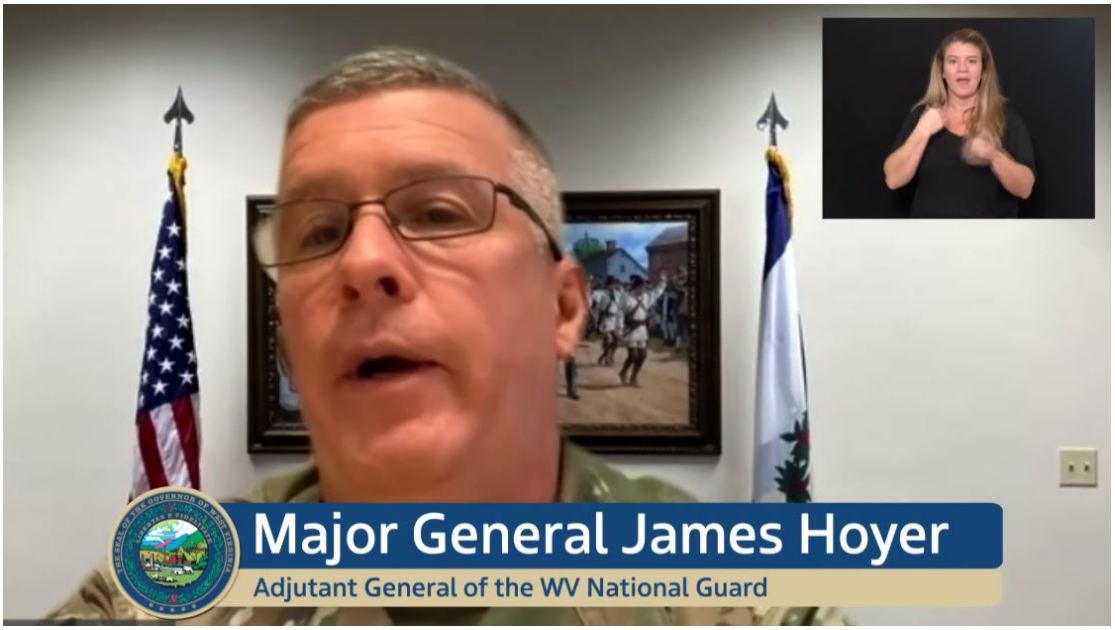
"I want to thank the U.S. Department of Justice and the Trump Administration for providing this funding to assist these nonprofit agencies in West Virginia that are dedicated to helping our citizens who have been victims of terrible criminal acts as they recover," Gov. Justice said.

Click here to read more (/News/press-releases/2020/Pages/Gov.-Justice-awards-$17.3-million-in-Victims-of-Crime-Act-grants-to-84-agencies-across-West-Virginia.aspx)

ALL "RISE WEST VIRGINIA" HOMES NOW UNDER CONTRACT

During his remarks in Friday's briefing, West Virginia National Guard Adjutant General Maj. Gen. James Hoyer announced that homes in the RISE West Virginia program have officially been placed under contract for construction, rehabilitation, or mobile home replacement through five contractors.

"A while back, Governor Justice called me to the office and said 'I want you to take the lead and have the National Guard help the Department of Commerce to get our RISE West Virginia program on track," Maj. Gen. Hoyer said. "I know, for a lot of people and for a lot of families, this was not as fast as it should have been initially, but we've made significant progress to move this program along, and this is an important milestone."



CITIES/COUNTIES GRANT FUNDING: OVER $160 MILLION HAS NOW BEEN AWARDED

Also today, Gov. Justice provided an update on cities and counties throughout West Virginia applying for funds through the federal CARES Act, reporting that more than $160 million has now been awarded all across the state.

A **web portal** (https://grants.wv.gov/en) is available for city and county government officials to apply. Interested parties can also call the helpline: **1-833-94-GRANT**.

Each of the recipients of CARES Act funding, along with grant amounts, are now available to view through the West Virginia State Auditor's Office **COVID-19 transparency website** (https://stories.opengov.com/westvirginia/published/mnOzKr2wB).

(https://grants.wv.gov/en)

FLU VACCINE REMINDER

Once again today, Gov. Justice took time out of his remarks on COVID-19 to remind and encourage all West Virginians to get their flu vaccine.

According to health officials, everyone 6 months and older should receive this vaccine.

Locate a flu vaccine near you through the **DHHR website** (https://dhhr.wv.gov/Pages/default.aspx).

(https://dhhr.wv.gov/Pages/default.aspx)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Click here to view all Executive Orders and other actions (https://governor.us15.list-manage.com/track/click?u=d525ab9ade4d860d2b5772468&id=3029d4fcc4&e=5c140b96bc) taken by Gov. Justice to combat the spread of COVID-19 in West Virginia.

For more information about COVID-19 prevention and more, call the State's toll-free hotline at **1-800-887-4304** or visit **Coronavirus.wv.gov** (https://dhhr.wv.gov/COVID-19/Pages/default.aspx).

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