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**News Release**

# DHHS COVID-19 Weekly Update

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**LINCOLN** – The Department of Health and Human Services is reporting 1,397 new COVID-19 cases this week, compared to 1,945 last week, a 28% decrease. The daily average of new positive cases in the last week was 197; **as of yesterday, there are a total of 220,720** positive COVID-19 cases. The total number of COVID-19-related deaths reported within the state to date is 2,245.

Cumulative hospitalizations in Nebraska due to COVID-19 number are at 6,540, with 142 patients currently hospitalized. More men than women have been hospitalized to date. Nationwide, National Public Radio (NPR) reports that adults under age 50 are the most hospitalized, making up 35% of all admissions for COVID-19; it is assumed that this is because most of them have not yet been vaccinated and may be more susceptible to new variants.

	April 13	April 21	April 28	May 5
Total positive cases	215,074	217,596	219,341	220,720
Current hospitalizations	166	163	130	142
Total deaths	2,226	2,229	2,242	2,245

Variants continue to increase in the state. To date, a total of 777 variants of concern have been identified. Of that total, there are 671 cases of the B.1.1.7 COVID-19 variant (U.K.), which is more contagious than the original strain of coronavirus and is the most dominant strain in the U.S. Other variants present in Nebraska are 84 cases of the B.1.427/429 variant (CA), 6 of the B.1.526 variant (NY), 6 cases of the B.1.351 variant (South Africa) and 10 cases of the P.1 variant (Brazil).



Testing platforms like Test Nebraska and others will still produce a positive result for the identified variants. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the National Public Health Laboratory (NPHL) have been working to increase sequencing capabilities within the state. Higher volumes of in-state sequencing began in January and NPHL currently has capacity to sequence more than 100 specimens per week. Creighton University is also sequencing roughly 100 specimens per week.

Although caution is required because of many of the unknowns surrounding the new variant strains, vaccines remain the greatest hope for returning to normal. Widespread vaccinations can help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and reduce hospitalizations and deaths related to COVID-19.

To date, roughly 43% of US residents have received at least one COVID-19


vaccine dose and approximately 29.5% have been fully vaccinated according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). About 35% of the US population has been infected with the virus that causes COVID-19; the agency estimates the virus has led to 114.6 million infections, 97.1 million symptomatic illnesses and 5.6 million hospitalizations from February 2020 to March 2021.

The more people get vaccinated, the fewer opportunities the virus has not only to transmit but to further mutate. Mutations are fueling some of the spikes around the country, including the dominant coronavirus variant in the U.S., the B.1.1.7 variant (UK). It is more contagious and hits younger people harder.

Younger people should also get vaccinated because of long-term consequences of COVID-19, as these can be quite serious. And those long-lasting symptoms can develop even in people who have had mild cases of COVID-19. Americans [have reported dozens of persistent symptoms](#)  that last months after their infection, including fatigue, headaches, memory loss, gastrointestinal problems, muscle aches, heart palpitations [and loss of smell or taste.](#) 

Nebraskans are reminded that precaution is the best defense against COVID-19 until you are vaccinated. You can be #BigRedResponsible by wearing a mask. Additionally, watching your distance, washing hands often, staying home when you're sick, and avoiding the 3Cs – crowded places, close contact with others, and confined spaces – remain critical to preventing infection and controlling spread. Officials continue to urge Nebraskans to be tested if they are exposed or develop COVID symptoms. Anyone who is not fully vaccinated and may have been exposed to COVID-19 should quarantine.



Nebraskans are encouraged to [Finish Strong](#) and do their part to end the pandemic by registering for the vaccine. Anyone 16 and older can now get

vaccinated. There are several options available. Register at [Vaccinate.Ne.Gov](#) , or with your local health district, or check with area pharmacies that may be scheduling appointments. Those registered will be alerted when a vaccine is available in their priority group and health district. There is a Spanish translation site for the vaccine portal on the state's website; users can access this by selecting Español from the language drop-down menu at the top-right side of the page.

## COVID-19 Testing

Testing continues to be available to help limit the spread of COVID-19. Anyone who may have been exposed to COVID-19, anyone experiencing any symptoms, those planning to travel, or those returning from travel are encouraged to schedule a COVID-19 test. Free testing is available at more than 60 Test Nebraska sites across the state, and has remained steady; rapid tests may be available for a fee at some medical walk-in centers. As of today, over 2,870,527 tests have been administered throughout Nebraska.


COVID-19 symptoms can include fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, tiredness, muscle aches, headache, loss of taste or smell, sore throat, runny nose, nausea or vomiting, and diarrhea. Those infected with any variant will show these same symptoms.

Visit [Testnebraska.com](#) , or [TestNebraska.com/es](#)  for Spanish, to schedule an appointment. Those with questions about testing, or who need help completing the online assessment, can call the **Test Nebraska hotline** at 402-207-9377.

## Vaccine Update

DHHS is allocating doses via an existing vaccine network that includes local health departments, federally-qualified health centers (FQHCs), community-based clinics, and tribal health care centers across the state.

For the week ending May 9, Nebraska is scheduled to receive 56,160 total doses of the Pfizer vaccine, 41,400 total doses of the Moderna vaccine, and 1,100 doses of the Johnson & Johnson/Janssen Pharmaceuticals vaccine, which the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) cleared to be distributed again in the US.

Any potential adverse reactions to vaccines should be reported into the CDC's vaccine adverse events reporting system (VAERS, <https://vaers.hhs.gov/> ) . The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) permits reporting of protected health information to public health authorities including the CDC and Federal Drug Administration (FDA). ACIP continues to provide oversight and updates on safety in all available vaccines.

Mild side effects like a sore arm and fatigue are some of the most common symptoms with COVID-19 vaccines. While many people will have no symptoms, others may experience headaches, chills or a fever. These side effects are normal and a sign your body is building protection, and you should be feeling better within a few days. Those receiving their first dose of the Pfizer or Moderna are reminded to keep their vaccination record card in a safe place and take it to their second dose appointment.


The Johnson and Johnson/Janssen Pharmaceuticals vaccine requires just one dose.

The Pfizer vaccine was 95% effective and the Moderna vaccine 94% effective in phase three clinical trials. Comparatively, the flu vaccine is generally 40 to 60% effective. Two doses are needed to reach full effectiveness against COVID-19, and the same brand of vaccine must be administered for both doses. The Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine has been approved for those 16 and older, and the Moderna and Johnson and Johnson/Janssen Pharmaceuticals vaccines are approved for those 18 and older.

Per CDC definition, as of today, DHHS has identified **343** possible vaccine breakthroughs among Nebraska residents, which include individuals with positive tests 14 days or more after completing a vaccination series. Out of the **669,348** Nebraskans fully vaccinated, this represents just 0.0005 (0.05%), indicating the vaccine is working for more than 99% of people who receive it. There is confidence in 121 of these individuals, for whom genomic sequencing was successful thereby suggesting a high level of virus was present in the specimen they provided. Variants of concern represent 104 (86%) of the 121 that have been successfully sequenced; six of these 121 have been hospitalized. Answers to these and other questions are available on the [COVID-19 Vaccine Information page](#) and are available in several languages.

The CDC considers a person to be fully vaccinated two weeks after receiving their final second dose, or in the case of the Johnson & Johnson/Janssen Pharmaceuticals vaccine, two weeks after their single dose. Officials also said people who are fully vaccinated do not need to quarantine if exposed to a COVID-19 case and may opt out of COVID-19 testing if they do not experience any symptoms.

## Vaccine Outreach

DHHS continues to share new information via the [Coronavirus website](#), as well as Facebook and Twitter and at virtual town halls. Members of the DHHS team hold regular Facebook Live session to discuss vaccine-related and pandemic-related topics. For those unable to watch live, all sessions are archived and available on the video tab of the [DHHS Facebook page](#)  and the DHHS website.


## Vaccine Dashboard


The DHHS data team continues to provide accurate and timely information to the COVID-19 Vaccination Dashboard last week. This morning, an update was made to the DHHS COVID Vaccination and Case Dashboards. As the

pandemic has evolved, some of the metrics that have been reported on are not as relevant to the current COVID response. The items that have been removed from the dashboards are:

- Phases tab on the vaccination dashboard
- Recoveries tab and recoveries related metrics on the case dashboard
- Turn Around Time tab on the case dashboard
- Hospital capacity on the case dashboard


These metrics are still monitored by DHHS internally on a regular basis and will be reacted to appropriately if the metrics change in an adverse direction.

As of Tuesday, more than 1,472,064 doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been given to Nebraskans throughout the state, according to DHHS. Additionally, over 679,694 Nebraskans are fully vaccinated. That number translates to 45.8% of those over 16 years of age. To follow Nebraska's COVID-19 vaccination progress, please visit the [COVID-19 Vaccination dashboard](#) .

These numbers include all vaccinations that took place in Nebraska last week, including through federal entities, such as the Indian Health Service, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Defense, and the Federal Retail Pharmacy Program. The Federal Retail Pharmacy Program is coordinated and managed by the CDC and those participating pharmacies in the state that have signed up and been approved by the federal government. For more on the Federal Retail Pharmacy Program, visit the CDC website <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/retail-pharmacy-program/participating-pharmacies.html> .

## Vaccine Registration

Nebraskans can register online to be notified when COVID-19 vaccination is available in their area, and a Spanish translation of the site is now

available. Available at [Vaccinate.Ne.Gov](https://vaccinate.ne.gov) , users should select Español from the language drop-down menu at the top-right side of the page.

As of today, more than 380,372 Nebraskans, with an average age of 51.4, have registered for the vaccine. Those interested in registering will need to provide name and contact information, date of birth and answer health questions used to help determine priority group eligibility. Any information entered is strictly confidential and used solely for this purpose. Friends, family and caregivers are encouraged to assist others with vaccine sign-up if needed, and the DHHS Information line can assist those with limited technology, language or Internet access, and is available by calling 531-249-1873 or 833-998-2275.

Those who entered a friend's email will have their emails sent to that friend's email address where they can again be assisted, this time to make their appointment. If the state's email address was used in your registration, either the state or your local public health department will contact you to help you make your appointment.

## **Directed Health Measures**

As vaccination continues, Directed Health Measures (DHMs) continue to be updated to provide clarity as more Nebraskans complete vaccination and recover from COVID-19. Some revisions to the DHM will occur and take effect tomorrow, May 6, at 12:01AM and continue through May 31, 2021.

These revisions remove the requirement that indoor venues holding large indoor gatherings must submit a plan to their applicable local public health department. Adherence to guidance for large indoor gatherings is strongly recommended.

Additionally school-aged individuals, defined as persons who are 5 to 18 years old, are no longer ordered to quarantine at home if they come into close contact with a person who is infected with COVID-19. School-aged



Individuals now move to the self-monitor category which requires that they should monitor themselves daily for the development of COVID-19 like symptoms. They should wear a facial covering and physically distance from persons who are not members of their household. Allowing school aged individuals to self-monitor in lieu of at home quarantine was already allowed for students exposed during school-related extracurricular activities, but as the end of the school year nears, this option is now allowed for all students

A DHM is in effect regarding those who have completed antibody tests. Unvaccinated individuals who test positive for antibodies are not required to quarantine if it's within 3 months of the completed antibody test. However, those who experience symptoms of COVID-19 are still required to quarantine.


In addition, a five-phase series of DHMs aimed at preserving hospital capacity for urgent medical care remains in effect for the entire state. Currently, less than 10% of hospital beds are needed for COVID-19 patients. The state is in the green phase, which removes capacity restrictions for indoor gatherings, but it's recommended that Nebraskans continue following guidance to reduce virus transmission. Organizers of events for 500 or more people, or 1,000 people in Douglas County, are required to receive approval from their local health department. Capacity restrictions remain in place for Lancaster County.

In addition, the DHHS COVID-19 information line is available to answer questions at 531-249-1873 or 833-998-2275. The line is staffed seven days a week from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. CT.

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