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DHHS COVID-19 Weekly Update

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News Release

For Immediate Release: 12/16/2020

No

CONTACT

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LINCOLN – The latest statewide total of COVID-19 cases is 150,861 as of Dec. 15. There have been 161 COVID-19-related deaths in Nebraska reported in the last seven days, for a total of 1,438. To date, a total of 85,127 Nebraskans testing positive for COVID-19 have recovered.

Hospitalizations for COVID-19 patients have remained lower than recent highs, with Nebraska hospitals caring for an average of 727 people a day over the last seven days, versus an average of 805 and 910 people in prior weeks.

The daily average of new positive cases has declined in the last week with a daily average of 1,180 cases in the last week, compared to 1,773 cases last week, and 1,787 and 1,982 cases a day in recent weeks.

	Nov. 24	Dec. 1	Dec. 8	Dec. 15
Total positive cases	117,682	130,194	142,603	150,861
Current hospitalizations	936	869	787	677
Total deaths	950	1,080	1,277	1,438

Dr. Gary Anthone, Chief Medical Officer and Director of Public Health for DHHS, said, “Thank you to everyone who has helped bring down the curve of COVID-19 hospitalizations in recent weeks. We have made progress and that helps ensure our health care workers are able to care for the people who need their help this holiday season.

As we prepare for the holidays, is still important to limit our interactions and be consistent about preventing the spread of COVID-19. Testing capacity is available so this is a prime opportunity to add an extra layer of

protection by getting a test before the holidays. We have the testing capacity available, so this is a time when we can use it to make sure we are as safe as possible."

Nebraskans are reminded to spread joy, not COVID, by wearing a mask, watching your distance, washing hands often, and avoiding the 3Cs – crowded places, close contact with others, and confined spaces – every time you're away from home.

DHMs Remain but Have Been Eased

A five-phase series of Directed Health Measures (DHMs) remain in effect for the entire state. DHM restrictions are aimed at preserving hospital capacity for urgent medical care as COVID-19 hospitalizations remain elevated.

More than 15% of beds are needed for COVID-19 patients, putting the state in the yellow threshold, which is the third most restrictive of the five levels of directives. Restrictions were eased on Saturday, Dec. 12. As a result, elective surgeries requiring an inpatient hospital stay can resume if a hospital can maintain 10% of beds for COVID-19 patients, and maximum capacity for indoor gatherings is now at 50%.

An outline of the DHMs is available at <https://www.dropbox.com/s/hmadcuih3j2xlyd/Color-Coded%20%20Phase%20Comparison%2011.13.20.pdf?dl=0>.

Vaccine Update

The first shipments of COVID-19 vaccine arrived this week, and it's expected that 15,600 doses will be given to hospital and EMS workers in a number of Nebraska communities by week's end.

DHHS intends to launch a COVID-19 vaccine dashboard next week that will share a variety of metrics that provide a picture of how vaccinations are progressing over time.

By month's end, Nebraska may receive 104,000 doses of vaccine targeted for health care personnel, and residents and staff of long-term care facilities.

As more vaccine doses become available, vaccination for other priority groups identified in the [State of Nebraska COVID-19 Vaccination Plan](#) will follow. Details are subject to further clarification and prioritization by the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, which determines priority groups for the U.S.

It's expected that sufficient supplies of COVID-19 vaccines won't be available to begin a mass vaccination effort until next spring. The Nebraska Immunization Program and statewide partners continue their planning for COVID-19 vaccine distribution and administration.

COVID-19 Testing via Test Nebraska

Testing continues to be crucial in the fight against COVID-19. Free testing continues to be available to any resident who wants one. Those who may have been exposed to COVID-19 or who are experiencing any symptoms are encouraged to schedule an appointment. Appointments are available at testing sites across the state.

COVID-19 symptoms can include a fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, tiredness, muscle aches, headaches, loss of taste or smell, sore throat, runny nose, nausea or vomiting, and diarrhea.

Visit [Testnebraska.com](https://testnebraska.com), or [TestNebraska/es](https://testnebraska.com/es) for Spanish, to schedule an appointment at one of more than 60 Test Nebraska locations. Those with questions about testing or who need help completing the online assessment can call the Test Nebraska hotline at (402) 207-9377.

Quarantine Reminder

DHHS recently updated DHMs to match the latest Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations shortening the window for quarantine.

For those who've been exposed to someone with COVID-19 or anyone experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, quarantine can end after seven days if all of the following conditions have been met:

- The person seeks a COVID-19 test on day five following their exposure and tests negative,
- The person is not experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, and
- The person continues to self-monitor for symptoms and wears a mask through day 14.

Those who've been exposed to COVID-19 but don't take a test can end quarantine when all of the following conditions have been met:

- At least 10 days have passed since their exposure,
- No COVID-19 symptoms have developed, and
- The person continues to self-monitor for symptoms, and wears a mask through day 14.

Those testing positive for COVID-19 must isolate for at least 10 days from when their symptoms began, or the date of their test if no symptoms are present. Isolation can end when:

- The person is fever-free without the use of fever reducing medicine for 24 hours, and
- Some COVID-19 symptoms may linger, but symptoms are improving.

Winter safety

If you are planning to gather over the holidays, getting a COVID-19 test beforehand can help protect someone who might be vulnerable to COVID-19.

Dr. Anthone said, "Testing appointments are available so we encourage anyone who plans to travel or who plans to see extended family to take advantage of the opportunity to be tested. If you're not feeling well but think it's a cold, we want you to get tested."

Those who host or attend a gathering with people from outside their household are encouraged to remain vigilant in practicing social distancing and to self-monitor for symptoms.

Anyone who may have been exposed to COVID-19 should quarantine and get tested. Everyone is encouraged to avoid the three Cs – crowded places, close contact and confined spaces.

Nebraskans seeking information or needing help with general questions can call the DHHS COVID-19 hotline, available from 8 a.m.-8 p.m. CT, seven days a week, by calling (402) 552-6645, or toll-free (833) 998-2275.

DHHS will continue to share new information via its Coronavirus website, <http://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx>, as well as on Facebook and Twitter.

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