

News Release

DHHS COVID-19 Weekly Update

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LINCOLN – For the third straight week, new COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and emergency room visits increased in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Nationwide, more Americans age 18 to 64 have gone to emergency departments for COVID-19 complications. This increase of mainly younger adults is because most of them have not yet been vaccinated. The number of variants in Nebraska is also increasing; these newer strains can be more infectious and cause more serious illness to younger people.

Hospitalizations in Nebraska due to COVID-19 continue to increase as well, with 166 patients currently hospitalized. Nebraska hospitals cared for an average of 167 COVID-19 patients a day over the last seven days. Daily averages in prior weeks were 140, 106, and 121 COVID-19 patients. Nebraska's main goal remains protecting hospital capacity.

While younger, unvaccinated adults get hospitalized with COVID-19, the number of elderly Americans getting hospitalized or dying from COVID-19 is on the decline, as they are more likely to be vaccinated.

As of Tuesday, the latest statewide total of positive COVID-19 cases is 215,074, with a total of 165,985 of those Nebraskans recovered. The total number of COVID-19-related deaths reported in Nebraska to date is 2,226.

Similar to the United States as a whole, Nebraska is reporting that cases are rising, with a daily average of 327 new positive cases in the last week, compared to 470 daily cases two weeks ago. Averages for positive cases are now based on specimen collection instead of lab report dates, which provides a more precise view of COVID-19 cases. Data from previous days is updated as lab results are received.

	March 23	March 30	April 6	April 13
Total positive cases	203,214	209,346	212,785	215,074
Current hospitalizations	109	116	151	166
Total deaths	2,150	2,180	2,183	2,226

The state has confirmed the presence of five COVID-19 variant strains; this includes an additional type of variant of COVID-19, known as B1.526 from New York, which is now in the state. The B.1.1.7 variant was originally identified in the United Kingdom, the B.1.427/B1.429 variants surfaced in California, and the P1 variant is from Brazil. The B.1.1.7 variant is more contagious than the original strain of coronavirus and is now the dominant strain in the U.S. and is more deadly.

A total of 291 of these variants of concern have been identified in the state. To date, 234 cases of the B.1.1.7 COVID-19 variant, 54 cases of the B1.427/B1.429 variant, 1 of B1.526.1, and 2 cases of the P1 variant have been identified in Nebraska. All available vaccines, Pfizer, Moderna and the

Johnson & Johnson/Janssen Pharmaceuticals vaccine, appear to be effective against all variants.

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and Nebraska Public Health Lab (NPHL) confirmed that this new variant of COVID-19 (B1.526 from New York) has been spreading throughout the United States, specifically in the Northeast, and is still being studied to determine the level of contagiousness and severity. Testing platforms like Test Nebraska and others will still produce a "positive" result for the identified B1.526 variant (and others).

DHHS and 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 the many 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. All approved vaccines were shown to prevent hospitalization and deaths related to COVID-19.

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. As the State is now in Phase 2B, which means anyone 16 and older can 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 2,700,000 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. Severity of a B117 variant infection appears to be elevated compared to normal strains, based on international hospitalization and mortality data.

Visit [Testnebraska.com](https://testnebraska.com) , or [TestNebraska.com/es](https://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

The entire state has moved to Phase 2B, which includes all Nebraskans age 16-49. This does not mean that every health district will immediately be able to vaccinate any adult. Some local health departments may choose to begin Phase 2B by prioritizing according to age within the phase (for example, by starting with only those persons 40 years of age and older).

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. A total of 135 sites across Nebraska receive vaccine shipments.

For the week ending April 18, Nebraska is scheduled to receive 52,650 total doses of Pfizer and 37,600 total doses of Moderna. The 1,100 doses of Johnson and Johnson/Janssen Pharmaceuticals that were scheduled to be received are expected to arrive, though the use of this vaccination is being temporarily paused by DHHS following CDC and FDA recommendations (<https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/joint-cdc-and-fda-statement-johnson-johnson-covid-19-vaccine> )

This message was communicated by DHHS to local health departments, healthcare providers, and pharmacies across the state following a rare and severe type of blood clot diagnosed in a Nebraska resident. People, particularly younger adult females who have received the Johnson & Johnson/Janssen Pharmaceuticals vaccine that develop severe headache, abdominal pain, vomiting, leg pain (and/or swelling), or shortness of breath within three weeks after vaccination should contact their health care provider.

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). The CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) continues to meet to discuss the

safety of the Johnson & Johnson/Janssen vaccine and to continue to provide oversight and updates on safety in all available vaccines.

The pause on the Johnson & Johnson/Janssen Pharmaceuticals vaccine has not caused significant interruption to vaccine administration efforts in the State. Registrants should check email and/or text alerts for potential scheduling changes. Most local health districts are continuing with already scheduled clinics and will use either Pfizer or Moderna.

Please note that at this time there are no recommendations to pause the use of the other two vaccines (Pfizer and Moderna). These two vaccines should be provided in place of the Johnson and Johnson /Janssen vaccine until further notice.

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.

A phase three clinical trial showed the Johnson & Johnson/Janssen Pharmaceutical vaccine had 66% efficacy in the U.S. at preventing any moderate to severe disease 28 days after vaccination (while being studied in

regions with new variant strains of COVID-19). Comparatively, the flu vaccine is generally 40 to 60% effective. **Each of these three authorized COVID-19 vaccines had 100% efficacy against COVID-19-related hospitalizations and deaths.** Since each of these COVID-19 vaccines works extremely well against the virus, individuals should feel confident they are reducing their risk when they choose to vaccinate. Moreover, every person who gets vaccinated is doing their part to help reduce spread and put an end to this global pandemic.

Per CDC definition, as of today, DHHS has identified 185 possible vaccine breakthroughs among Nebraska residents, which include individuals with positive tests 14 days or more after completing a vaccination series. Out of the 465,648 Nebraskans fully vaccinated, this represents just 0.04%, indicating the vaccine is working for more than 99% of people who receive it. We have the most confidence in 28 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 (61%) or 17 of the 28 that have been successfully sequenced. Out of 6,424 total hospitalizations, four have been among vaccinated individuals. That is .06% of COVID-19 hospitalizations. These numbers are extremely small.

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. Each week, members of the DHHS team hold a mid-day 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 DHHS's website.

In an ongoing effort to reach out to the Hispanic community, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Douglas County Health Department are partnering with several influential Hispanic organizations in South Omaha to hold an **online town hall on Thursday, April 15, 2021, at 6:00 PM**. Residents can receive the latest information from health professionals and have their questions about the COVID-19 vaccine answered by doctors.

Organizations involved in the town hall include: OneWorld Community Health Centers Inc., The Heartland Workers Center, the Latino Center of the Midlands, the Metro Young Latino Professionals Association (MYLPA), and the Tri-Faith Initiative.

Participants will include Dr. Kristine McVea, OneWorld's medical director, and Mitzi Infante-Magana, physician assistant, OneWorld Provider; Josie Rodriguez, administrator for the Office of Health Disparities and Health Equity for Nebraska DHHS; Diana Acero, resource specialist for the Douglas County Health Department; and Yanira Garcia, (Moderator), communications manager for Omaha Union.

Nebraskans are encouraged to register at the link below; submit any questions to eservellon@trifaith.org. Zoom Meeting

https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_g6k9qTOiQZaEKInuIRPyNQ 

Vaccine Dashboard

As of Tuesday, more than 1,127,066 doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been given to Nebraskans throughout the state, according to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Additionally, over 465,648 Nebraskans have completed vaccination. That number translates to 31.4% of those over 16 years of age to be fully vaccinated. To follow Nebraska's COVID-19 vaccination progress, please visit the [COVID-19 Vaccination dashboard](#) .

Some changes will be made to the dashboard beginning tomorrow. The front page will be simplified on the overview tab; other changes include:

- Federal Agency vaccine allocations will be added every Wednesday just as all other allocations are accounted for on the dashboard.
- Federal Agency administered doses will be added every day starting tomorrow.
- Federal Agencies include the following:
 - Department of Defense
 - Indian Health Service
 - Veterans Health
 - Federal correctional facilities (Nebraska does not have any federal correctional facilities)
- There will be about 73,000 new doses administered on the dashboard due to Federal agencies.
- Approximately 103,000 new doses allocated on the dashboard due to Federal agencies.

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 366,939 Nebraskans with an average age of 51.7, 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 have registered for vaccination with their local health department do not need to register a second time using the state site. Local health departments and DHHS are working to migrate all registrations. Those who are 18 to 64 with a high-risk medical condition and live outside of Lancaster County are asked to register using the state site to help ensure proper prioritization.

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.

Recent updates include information about the removal of targeted age groups and critical infrastructure worker criteria for Federal Retail Pharmacy participants, allowing vaccination of anyone 16 and older.

While this means that pharmacies are eligible to begin vaccinating those 16 and older, this does not mean that all of them are indeed vaccinating or even scheduling as yet. Every pharmacy will work within their own corporate structure to determine their priority groups. It is important to note that the Federal Retail pharmacy Program is coordinated and managed by those pharmacies in the state who have signed up and been approved by the federal government. The state does not manage allocations nor does it determine when those allocations are ordered.

It is strongly encouraged that people look for other pharmacies (even outside of their jurisdiction) that may be vaccinating in their age group. It continues to be stressed that vaccination phases are unique to each jurisdiction, and/or to each provider as Nebraska continues to rollout and create schedules based on availability.

Those who have received both COVID-19 vaccine doses are not required to quarantine if they are exposed to someone with COVID-19. Individuals should self-monitor for symptoms for 14 days, and are required to wear a mask when in public. Anyone who later develops symptoms must then quarantine at home.

Those who have recovered from coronavirus within the last three months are not required to quarantine if they are exposed to someone with COVID-19. Wearing a mask is encouraged but not required. Those who have recovered from coronavirus longer than three months ago are required to quarantine if they are exposed to someone with COVID-19.

A new 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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