

News Release

DHHS COVID-19 Weekly Update

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MEDIA CONTACT

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ATTENTION: Questions from the public about vaccines can be directed to the COVID-19 information line at (531) 249-1873 or (833) 998-2275. Please visit your local health department's website for more information on how vaccination is proceeding in your area.

LINCOLN – The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is reporting 588 new COVID-19 cases this week, compared to 1,368 last week, a 43% decrease. The daily average of new positive cases in the last week was 84. Cumulative hospitalizations in Nebraska due to COVID-19 number are at 6,630.

	April 28	May 5	May 12	May 19
Total positive cases	219,341	220,720	222,088	222,676
Current hospitalizations	130	142	130	91
Total deaths	2,242	2,245	2,257	2,244

The DHHS Data Quality Team performs regular reviews of data to ensure efficacy. As these reviews continue, if a discrepancy is noted, the team will investigate and make appropriate adjustments when deemed necessary. A change in numbers concerning the cumulative total of deaths is due to a number of unconfirmed cases being inadvertently assigned a confirmed status. Upon review the improperly coded cases were immediately corrected. These reviews are ongoing and will continue to be corrected.

Variants continue to increase in the state. Last week the identified B.1.617 variant from India was found in the state and appears to be spreading in the United States, but it is not accounting for a substantial proportion of variants identified nationally. As of today, there are 2 cases reported in Nebraska.

To date, a total of 1,147 variants of concern (VOC) have been identified. Of this total, there are 1,011 cases of the B.1.1.7 COVID-19 variant (U.K.), which is more contagious than the original strain of coronavirus and is still the most dominant strain in the U.S. Other variants present in Nebraska are 102 cases of the B.1.427/429 variant (CA), 13 of the B1.526 variant (NY), 6 cases of the B.1.351 variant (South Africa) and 13 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 Nebraska 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.

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), which is more contagious than earlier strains and hits younger people harder. The pace of coronavirus vaccinations in Nebraska has slowed significantly over the past month.

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. However, [school-aged individuals \(5-18\) can follow the state's self-monitoring requirements](#) .

Nebraskans are encouraged to [Finish Strong](#) and do their part to end the pandemic by registering for the vaccine. Anyone 12 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. 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 23, Nebraska is scheduled to receive 56,160 total doses of the Pfizer vaccine and 41,400 total doses of the Moderna vaccine. No doses are scheduled to be received again of the Johnson & Johnson/Janssen Pharmaceuticals vaccine.

While every effort is made to reduce wastage, the decrease in need of mass clinics due to the vaccine becoming more widely available through larger numbers of various providers; a natural outcome of this shift will be a rise in wasted doses.

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.

About 158 million people in the United States have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine and nearly 124 million people are fully vaccinated, according to data published Monday night by the CDC.

Nearly 60% of adults in the US have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine, and more than 47% of adults are fully vaccinated. Among seniors,

nearly 85% have received at least one dose and about 73% are fully vaccinated.

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 vaccines 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.

Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines require two doses 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 12 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 489 possible vaccine breakthroughs among Nebraska residents, which include individuals with positive tests 14 days or more after completing a vaccination series. Out of the 777,899 Nebraskans fully vaccinated, this represents just 0.0006 (0.06%), indicating the vaccine is working for more than 99% of people who receive it. There is confidence in 205 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 182 (89%) of the 205 that have been successfully sequenced; the 13 of these 205 that have been hospitalized represents .02% of all hospitalizations (6,633) to date. The two that have died represents .09% of all deaths in Nebraska to date (2,256). 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.

Pediatricians are concerned about the challenge of getting children up to date on their childhood vaccines, and balancing that with scheduling potential COVID-19 shots, as there has been a decline in routine immunizations since the start of the pandemic. COVID-19 vaccines and other vaccines may now be administered without regard to timing. This includes simultaneous administration of COVID-19 vaccines and other vaccines on the same day, as well as co-administration within 14 days. When deciding whether to co-administer with COVID-19 vaccines, providers should consider whether the patient is behind or at risk of becoming behind on recommended vaccines.

Parents getting their adolescent vaccinated can bring them one step closer to enjoying the activities they have missed. As of Sunday, the CDC is reporting that Nebraska gave at least one dose of vaccine to 14,000 residents, ages 12-17.

While fewer children have been sick with COVID-19 compared to adults, they can be infected with COVID-19. Adolescents, like adults, may have some side effects, which are normal signs that their body is building protection. These side effects may affect an adolescent's ability to do daily activities, but they should go away in a few days. Without vaccination, an adolescent may be at risk for getting seriously ill and suffering pain, disability, and even death from COVID-19.

Parents are being urged to get their children caught up on immunizations as children under 12 years of age could soon be eligible as well to get vaccinated against COVID-19.

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

As of Tuesday, more than 1,612,926 doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been given to Nebraskans throughout the state, according to DHHS. Additionally, over 777,899 Nebraskans are fully vaccinated. That number translates to 52.4% of those over 16 years of age. To follow Nebraska's COVID-19 vaccination progress, please visit the [COVID-19 Vaccination dashboard](#) .

The COVID Case and Vaccination Dashboards will be updated Monday through Friday. Monday's totals will contain the weekend data. 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 386,383 Nebraskans, with an average age of 51.0, 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.

Through the end of this month, there is no 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.

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 monitor themselves for COVID-19 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. The state is in the green phase, which removes capacity restrictions for indoor gatherings, but it is recommended that Nebraskans continue following guidance to reduce virus transmission according to their local health departments.

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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