

News Release

DHHS COVID-19 Weekly Update

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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 521 new COVID-19 cases this week, compared to 533 last week, a 2.3% decrease. This is the lowest figure since early April 2020, five weeks after the state recorded its first case. The daily average of new positive cases in the last week was 74. In the past two weeks, Nebraska's case count has decreased more than 60% – the third-steepest drop by percentage in the nation.

The United States is adding fewer than 30,000 cases a day for the first time since June of last year, which is a 39% decrease from two weeks ago. In much of the country, the virus outlook is improving. More women than men contract COVID-19, but more men are hospitalized as a result. Active hospitalized case counts are updated once a day based on a point in time

snap shot of the hospitalized COVID-19 cases from the hospital facilities. Cumulative hospitalized cases to date are tallied from case investigation data.

	May 5	May 12	May 19	May 26
Total positive cases	220,720	222,088	222,676	223,197
Current hospitalizations	142	130	91	79
Total deaths	2,245	2,257	2,244	2,249

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. These reviews are ongoing and will continue to be corrected.

COVID-19 variants continue to increase in the state. To date, a total of 1,363 variants of concern (VOC) have been identified. Of this total, there are 1,205 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), 17 of the B1.526 variant (NY), 10 cases of the B.1.351 variant (South Africa), 11 of the B1.617 variant (India), and 18 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 (U.K.), 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.

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. Testing sites will be closed for Memorial Day.

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 30, Nebraska is scheduled to receive 56,160 total doses of the Pfizer vaccine and 41,920 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 means 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.

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 537 possible vaccine breakthroughs among Nebraska residents, which include individuals with positive tests 14 days or more after completing a vaccination series. Out of the 804,013 Nebraskans fully vaccinated, this represents just 0.0007 (0.07%), indicating the vaccine is working for more than 99% of people who receive it. There is confidence in 228 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 204 (89%) of the 228 that have been successfully sequenced

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.

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 has a higher risk of developing a severe form of the illness with long-lasting complications or even death.

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 1,663,593 doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been given to Nebraskans throughout the state, according to DHHS. Additionally, over 804,013 Nebraskans are fully vaccinated. That number translates to 42.2% of those over 12 years of age. To follow Nebraska's COVID-19 vaccination progress, please visit

<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/ece0db09da4d4ca68252c3967aa1e9dd/> .

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 388,341 Nebraskans, with an average age of 50.9, 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

Nebraska does not have any statewide health directives; any recommendations made will be through an individual's local health departments, which continue to encourage people to get vaccinated if they have not already.

The DHHS COVID-19 information line is available to answer questions at (531) 249-1873 or (833) 998-2275. The line is staffed every day from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. CT.

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