

## *West Virginia Update*

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### COVID-19 Cases Increase by 940, Deaths by 14

The West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources reported today the state has recorded 14 more deaths from COVID-19 in the past day, raising the total to 1,849. The latest to die included: a 93-year-old woman from Wood County, a 72-year-old man from Kanawha County, a 54-year-old man from Cabell County, a 66-year-old man from Mercer County, an 81-year-old man from Doddridge County, a 65-year-old woman from Kanawha County, a 66-year-old man from Harrison County, a 74-year-old woman from Kanawha County, a 68-year-old man from Wood County, a 36-year-old woman from Kanawha County, an 83-year-old woman from Wood County, an 84-year-old man from Cabell County, a 78-year-old man from Kanawha County, and a 58-year-old woman from Hancock County.

Kanawha County leads the state with the most deaths with 248. Other counties with deaths include: Cabell with 135; Wood with 87; Mercer with 78; Berkeley and Hancock with 77 each; Mineral with 73; Putnam with 67; Logan with 66; Fayette with 61; Marshall with 60; Ohio with 57; Monongalia with 54; Brooke and Greenbrier with 47 each; Harrison with 45; Jackson with 43; Raleigh with 40; Jefferson with 31; Marion, Mason, Wayne and Wyoming with 26 each; Hampshire with 24; Mingo and Upshur with 20 each; Grant and Summers with 19 each; Wetzell with 18; Barbour with 15; Hardy with 14; Pleasants with 12; Lewis and Monroe with 11 each; Morgan with 10; Lincoln, Nicholas and Pocahontas with nine each; McDowell, Randolph and Ritchie with eight each; Tucker with seven; Gilmer and Roane with six each; Doddridge

with five; Clay with four; Pendleton and Tyler with three each; and Braxton and Wirt with one each.

DHHR's dashboard today shows West Virginia has reached 112,617 total cases, an increase of 940 in the past day. That includes 90,494 confirmed and 22,123 probable cases. The number of active cases is 25,737 with 638 of them hospitalized, 167 in intensive care and 88 on ventilators. The total number of tests administered during the pandemic is 1,801,381. The cumulative level of positive tests compared to the total number of tests is 5.52 percent. The daily positive rate is 5.25 percent. By this morning, West Virginia had received 156,300 first doses of vaccines and had administered 137,068 of them for a rate of 87.7 percent, and the state had received 75,500 second doses and administered 32,122 of them for a rate of 42.5 percent.

Among West Virginia's counties, Kanawha is in the lead with 10,483 cases. Others with at least 5,000 cases include: Berkeley with 8,289; Monongalia with 6,648; Cabell with 6,604; Wood with 6,227. Those with at least 1,000 cases include: Harrison with 4,157; Raleigh with 3,797; Mercer with 3,754; Putnam with 3,588; Ohio with 3,180; Jefferson with 3,072; Marion with 3,023; Marshall with 2,612; Hancock with 2,360; Mineral with 2,337; Preston with 2,305; Fayette with 2,218; Logan with 2,169; Wayne with 2,157; Greenbrier with 2,100; Randolph with 2,032; Brooke with 1,811; Mingo with 1,803; Jackson with 1,526; Wyoming with 1,457; Mason with 1,432; Boone with 1,338; Upshur with 1,333; Hampshire with 1,278; McDowell with 1,166; Hardy with 1,119; Lincoln with 1,065; and Barbour with 1,030. Those with at least 500 cases include: Nicholas with 966; Grant with 936; Taylor with 932; Wetzel with 930; Monroe with 839; Pleasants with 734; Braxton with 718; Summers with 642; Gilmer with 542; Pocahontas with 529; Tyler with 522; Ritchie with 516; and Pendleton with 505. Those with at least 200 cases include: Tucker with 427; Roane with 421; Doddridge with 375; Clay with 310; Wirt with 305; and Webster with 225. The only county with fewer than 200 cases is Calhoun with 194.

DHHR reports whites make up 61.8 percent of cases, blacks make up 2.3 percent and others make up 34.1 percent.

More information is available from DHHR's online dashboard at:  
<https://dhhr.wv.gov/COVID-19/Pages/default.aspx>.

## State Has 15 Red and 28 Orange Counties on DHHR Map

The daily County Alert System map from the Department of Health and Human Resources shows 15 red counties today. They include Berkeley, Boone, Braxton, Brooke, Doddridge, Hardy, Marshall, Mingo, Pendleton, Pocahontas, Preston, Ritchie, Tyler, Wetzel and Wirt.

Twenty-eight other counties are orange on today's map. They include Barbour, Cabell, Calhoun, Gilmer, Grant, Greenbrier, Hampshire, Hancock, Harrison, Jackson, Jefferson, Lincoln, Logan, Marion, Mason, Monroe, Morgan, Nicholas, Ohio, Pleasants, Putnam, Raleigh, Roane, Summers, Upshur, Wayne, Wood and Wyoming.

Seven counties are gold: Clay, Fayette, Kanawha, Mercer, Randolph, Taylor and Webster. Four counties are yellow: Lewis, McDowell, Mineral and Monongalia. Tucker is the only green county.

Red is for counties with the highest level of COVID-19 cases. Orange is the next level down, followed by gold, yellow and green.

## New Scheduling System for Vaccinations Will Begin Next Week

Gov. Jim Justice announced today the state will implement a new online system for West Virginians to schedule vaccinations on Monday, which should relieve some pressure now on local health departments. He also announced in this afternoon's COVID-19 briefing the state is expanding its network of vaccination clinics and getting ready to activate the old Fairmont Hospital to handle COVID-19 cases because other hospitals in north-central West Virginia are getting overloaded.

"We very soon will be launching an online, statewide vaccine scheduling and distribution communications tool," Justice said. "It will go live on Monday morning at 8 a.m. We have partnered with a company called Everbridge. This company helps states notify their citizens when there is a fire, a flood or a hurricane, but now, they're going to help us coordinate vaccines as we can get them from the federal government. We will be the first state to turn on this new vaccine scheduling system. They have helped us stand this up during this week."

West Virginians who are age 65 and older will be able to go to the website or call the state's vaccine hotline to get their information into the system beginning Monday morning, he said. The system can notify people about appointments through texts, emails and phone calls, Justice said.

Secretary Bill Crouch of the Department of Health and Human Resources said his agency worked very hard this week to arrange for the new system because the governor insisted on it.

"He was very adamant to us that we fix this problem," he said. "We expect this to take a lot of the telephone load off of our local health departments. Please be patient with those folks. They're doing a terrific job."

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Crouch said this won't be the first time the state has worked with Everbridge. "Everbridge has been doing this for quite a while for other areas for state government," he said. "We're using this service to facilitate and streamline our vaccination program. We're very excited about it."

When he was asked the cost and how the state will pay for the new system, Crouch said, "The cost of this system is about \$760,000 a year at this point. Those costs will drop somewhat

in subsequent years. We weighed that heavily in terms of gut funding, and the governor was very direct to get the cost down as much as we could do, and we did do that.”

The state is hoping to use money from the pandemic relief bill Congress passed in December to pay for the system, he said, but if that is not available, DHHR will make sure the system is paid for somehow.

Justice agreed with that and added, “We have all got to hope and pray that this is a onetime expense.”

Meanwhile, the state is working on providing vaccinations to West Virginians in more locations even though West Virginia is not getting as many doses as the state can use.

*“By February first, we will expand our community vaccination clinic model to all 55 counties.” – Gov. Jim Justice*

“By February first, we will expand our community vaccination clinic model to all 55 counties,” Justice said. “This is to make sure that our limited supply of COVID vaccines are reaching every corner of this state.”

Maj. Gen. Jim Hoyer, director of the state’s joint interagency task force, said, “We continue to work to develop not just a specific clinic site but a model system across 55 counties because we know we have to penetrate all 55 counties to get to people in an efficient way.”

Justice said the state also plans to hold more than 15 community vaccination clinics just for health care workers. “Our goal is to offer [vaccines to] 12,000 individuals who have been working on the front lines of this pandemic,” he said. Those clinics will be held on Friday or Saturday or both days at locations in Berkeley, Braxton, Cabell, Hancock, Hardy, Harrison, Kanawha, Logan, Mercer, Raleigh and Wood counties, he said.

Despite these efforts to make it easier for West Virginians to get vaccinations, Justice is frustrated that the federal government hasn’t been providing as many doses as leaders in the Trump administration had promised.

“We do not have enough doses of vaccine for all West Virginians that are 65 and above at this time,” he said. By Sunday, all of the doses of vaccines the state currently has will be put into people’s arms, he said.

Even though he considers himself a personal friend of Donald Trump and was among many Republican leaders who were reluctant for weeks to concede that Trump had lost the November election, Justice said he wasted no time trying to establish a good relationship with the new administration of President Joe Biden. He said he spoke Wednesday afternoon about 1:30 with Biden’s new COVID-19 czar, Jeff Zients, about West Virginia’s need for more doses of vaccines.

“I think he heard me very well,” Justice said, adding that everyone must get behind the efforts of the new president.

“In this situation, the squeaky wheel gets the grease, and that’s what we’re going to continue to be,” he said. “We’re going to be the squeaky wheel.”

About the old Fairmont Hospital, Justice said the state is getting ready to employ about 65 people there to handle up to 42 COVID-19 patients. When the previous owner of the hospital closed it early last year, the state moved in to preserve it for use as an overflow facility for pandemic patients, much as it had arranged for St. Francis Hospital in Charleston to be used for that purpose.

Harrison, Marion and Monongalia counties currently have the three highest rates of COVID-19 infection in the state, Justice said. “This requires us to act now and be prepared in regard to our hospitalization rates,” he said. “The recent COVID surge is exceeding inpatient capacity at WVU Hospital and the United Hospital Center in Clarksburg. Many individuals are delaying care because there are no beds available there. Based on these statistics, there is an immediate need to increase bed capacity at the old Fairmont Hospital.”

Today’s briefing came two days after most students in the state returned to their classrooms for the first time in several weeks. Justice had called for that return and welcomed it.

“I am really happy that our schools have reopened to in-person learning, and it’s going smoothly at this time,” he said. “The pandemic shines a light on the important roles our teachers and service personnel play in the lives of our children and our families and our communities each and every day.”

Although most school districts have resumed in-person classes this week, a few initially defied a state school board order to reopen their classrooms. Justice called that a mistake on the part of certain county school boards, but he thinks almost all of them are reversing their positions.

When he was asked about lawsuits planned or already filed by the American Federation of Teachers-West Virginia and the West Virginia Education Association against reopening classrooms until teachers and other school employees are fully vaccinated against COVID-19, Justice suggested that those workers should not follow their union leaders. He also indicated he still holds a grudge against the unions for endorsing his Democratic opponent in last year’s race for governor.

*“The recent COVID surge is exceeding inpatient capacity at WVU Hospital and the United Hospital Center in Clarksburg. Many individuals are delaying care because there are no beds available there. Based on these statistics, there is an immediate need to increase bed capacity at the old Fairmont Hospital.” – Gov. Jim Justice*

“If you don’t want to go to work, I can’t help that,” Justice said. “If you’re really in a situation to where the union leaders are out there just beating the drum and everything – they did a marvelous job in the last election. I have no earthly clue why you are trying to cling to union leaders that took you down the wrong path.”

On other matters, Justice said:

- West Virginia has 98 outbreaks at long-term care facilities.
- Six churches have outbreaks in five counties: Clay, Hampshire, Nicholas, Summers and Wetzel.
- The corrections system has 163 inmates with active cases, including 105 at Lakin and 45 at the North Central Regional Jail. It also has 29 staff members with active cases.
- The inauguration ceremony for statewide elected officials will be held Friday at one o’clock. Attendance will be limited to the dignitaries and their families, as well as the media and other invited guests. The ceremony will be streamed live and broadcast.



*West Virginia Update is produced by TSG Consulting, a public relations and governmental affairs firm based in Charleston. For more information about TSG Consulting’s services, call 304-345-1161.*