

West Virginia Update
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West Virginia Records Nine More COVID-19 Deaths

The West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources reported today the state has recorded nine more COVID-19 deaths in the past day, raising the total to 275. The latest to die included: a 91-year-old woman from Cabell County, an 84-year-old woman from Kanawha County, a 78-year-old man from Grant County, a 66-year-old man from Harrison County, an 86-year-old man from Harrison County, a 76-year-old man from Harrison County, a 75-year-old woman from Kanawha County, a 71-year-old woman from Kanawha County and an 83-year-old woman from Kanawha County.

Kanawha County leads the state with the most deaths with 56. Other counties with deaths include: Logan with 36; Mercer with 24; Jackson with 22; Berkeley and Wayne with 11 each; Fayette with 10; Cabell with eight; Grant, Harrison, Mingo and Monroe with seven each; Ohio and Taylor with six each; Monongalia, Raleigh and Wood with five each; Jefferson, Mineral and Preston with four each; Greenbrier, Marion, Nicholas and Wyoming with three each; Clay, Lewis, Lincoln, Pleasants and Putnam with two each; and Barbour, Brooke, Hampshire, Marshall, Mason, Pendleton, Randolph and Roane with one each.

West Virginia now has recorded 12,820 confirmed and probable COVID-19 cases, which is an increase of 121 over the past day. That includes 12,519 confirmed cases and 301 probable cases. The number of active cases is 3,184 with 151 of them hospitalized, 58 in intensive care units and 24 on ventilators. Out of 487,714 total tests, 474,894 have come back negative. The

cumulative level of positive tests compared to the total number of tests is 2.63 percent. The daily rate of positive cases is 2.69 percent.

Among West Virginia's 55 counties, Kanawha is in the lead with 2,019 cases. Others with at least 300 cases include: Monongalia with 1,715; Berkeley with 884; Cabell with 658; Logan with 547; Fayette with 475; Raleigh with 423; Putnam with 403; Jefferson with 401; Mercer with 380; Wood with 333; Ohio with 332; Harrison with 324; Wayne with 320; and Mingo with 301. Those with at least 100 cases include: Marion with 244; Randolph with 230; Jackson with 229; Boone with 176; Mineral with 149; Grant with 147; Lincoln and Monroe with 144 each; Preston with 142; Marshall with 140; Hancock with 135; Mason with 125; Greenbrier with 117; Taylor with 114; and Brooke with 105. Other counties with at least 20 cases include: Hampshire with 95; McDowell and Wyoming with 80 each; Hardy with 75; Nicholas with 69; Upshur with 59; Pocahontas with 58; Pendleton and Wetzel with 46 each; Morgan with 45; Roane with 41; Barbour with 37; Clay with 29; Summers with 28; and Calhoun with 22. Other counties with cases include: Gilmer with 19; Doddridge with 17; Pleasants, Tucker and Tyler with 15 each; Ritchie with 11; Braxton and Wirt with nine each; and Webster with seven.

DHHR reports whites make up 79.2 percent of the state's COVID-19 cases, blacks make up 6.4 percent and others make up the remaining 14.3 percent. About 3.6 percent of West Virginia's population is African-American.

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

Twelve Counties Are Red or Orange

The latest County Alert System map from the Department of Health and Human Resources shows Monongalia County is still the only one colored red, while eleven other counties are colored orange.

For the first time, Lincoln County is orange. Other orange counties include: Boone, Calhoun, Fayette, Kanawha, Logan, Mingo, Monroe, Ohio, Pocahontas and Putnam. Two counties that were orange late last week but are back down to yellow are Cabell and Wayne.

Red and orange counties have the highest levels of COVID-19 cases. Orange means that a county has 10 to 24.9 COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people. Red means a county has 25 or more cases per 100,000.

Governor Wants More Changes in Color-Code System

Gov. Jim Justice has called a late afternoon meeting of his top advisors on the COVID-19 situation in West Virginia to consider changing the color-coded system for determining whether schools can hold in-person instruction and play sports. He also wants them to consider a way to control the number of cases associated with West Virginia University students that has made

Monongalia County the only county in the state to be colored red on the maps issued by both the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Resources.

In addition, Justice said at today's COVID-19 briefing he is trying to persuade a religious school in Kanawha County not to defy his executive order that prohibits in-person instruction in the county until its COVID-19 numbers go down. Likewise, he is warning people involved in whitewater rafting in Fayette County to take more precautions against spreading the coronavirus.

In regard to the color-coding system that affects schools, Justice said the orange category is too large because it goes from 10 cases per 100,000 people to almost 25 cases per 100,000 people. That means schools in counties at the lower end of that range are being unfairly treated the same as those in counties near the top end of the range, he said.

“I think we need to look at adding a color into the color-code system that enters right in above yellow, and I think that color should be gold, because that to me is a blend between orange and yellow.” – Gov. Jim Justice

“I think we need to look at adding a color into the color-code system that enters right in above yellow, and I think that color should be gold, because that to me is a blend between orange and yellow,” Justice said. Gold could go from 10 to perhaps 15 or 16, he said.

“It would allow us to go back to school in the gold, and it would allow our sports teams to play in the gold,” Justice said, although he suggested the number of spectators at gold schools games could be restricted more than the number for schools in yellow or green.

West Virginia's system of color-coding counties according to their levels of COVID-19 cases is based on one developed by the Harvard Global Health Institute. The state already has changed the coding from the original model a few times, and Dr. Clay Marsh, the state's COVID-19 czar sees nothing wrong with continuing to change it. He said it is just one model agreed upon by some health experts.

“There is nothing absolutely magical about a single model,” Marsh said.

Further, Justice wants to make it possible for school bands to play more at games. “I have no earthly idea why we can't divide the band and have the band have the opportunity to play at different times throughout the game,” he said. “I do not know why we're only allowing the bands to play one time during the games.”

Justice called such decisions “tough in every way” and said they are inhibiting his sleep at night. He said he is trying to adapt as he sees problems in the system. He also is still considering what else he can do to persuade people in counties with higher levels of COVID-19 cases to restrict their activities that might spread the virus.

“I am going to look at counties if they remain in the orange and/or red,” Justice said. “I’m going to look at additional things that we can do within those counties from the standpoint of things that we need to shut down to make things better.”

It doesn’t make sense to keep kids out of school while allowing other activities to go on, he said. However, he also doesn’t like it that certain religious school operators are defying his executive order that is keeping schools in Kanawha County closed while the county is coded orange.

“We have a situation in Kanawha County with Bible Center School,” Justice said. “They are taking it on themselves to just ignore the executive order that the governor’s put in place and go back to school.”

Although he called it “a crying, pitiful shame” that Bible Center School seems to be violating the law, he said his staff is still trying to persuade the school leaders to comply while he gets more legal advice on whether enforcement of his executive order would violate the First Amendment right to freedom of religion. Justice said he is not ready to crack down on the school, but that’s still a possibility.

“If we have to be enforceful, well, we’ll be enforceful.” – Gov. Jim Justice

“If we have to be enforceful, well, we’ll be enforceful,” he said. “In this situation, you can only, only solve this problem legislating for the masses. When you try to deal with every single exception, and you do

that, you’re going to get yourself in big trouble.”

The governor called the recent increase in COVID-19 cases in Kanawha County “a colossal issue right now.”

Justice also is focused on problems in Monongalia County. “They’re so red in Mon County that they’re off-the-chart red, and no question a big contributor to that has been WVU.”

Many WVU students have tested positive for COVID-19, he said, but state officials can’t force them to go home or to stop them from doing so, which could spread the virus in their home communities. His proposed solution is to put the students who are positive into a couple of the dormitories.

“We could keep them there and let them continue to do their schoolwork online,” Justice said. “And in addition to that, because they’re in a congregate setting, we could count them on our color-code thing as a one.”

That latter proposal might help get Monongalia County's numbers down enough to move it into a lower category that would allow in-person instruction in the public schools and high school sports teams to play. Many people have complained that the public school students are being punished unfairly because of the rash of COVID-19 cases among WVU students.

"We have got to come to that solution and come to that solution immediately," Justice said. "Now, I'm not positive that that is a solution, but at least it's an idea."

Justice made his proposals on the same day that a few hundred people, including students, parents and coaches from schools in orange and red counties, protested outside the Capitol. They chanted, "Let them play" and "Open schools," as the governor arrived at the Capitol. Although Justice subsequently announced he would have his advisors consider his proposed changes, he said during his briefing he would not be swayed by protesters or anyone from Washington, D.C.

On the subject of why WVU is allowed to play football games in Morgantown while high schools in the same county are not allowed to play, Justice said one big difference between WVU and the high schools is that the university is testing more for COVID-19.

"I think the testing is enormously important," he said. "I think the next part that's really aiding them is their med school that's sitting there."

However, Justice also said those who have challenged the situation have a legitimate point. "It's a fair question and a very fair concern," he said. Monongalia County has "a bigtime issue" because not enough WVU students are isolating themselves enough from others, he said.

"We need to test now every single person that goes on the WVU campus – everyone – and what we need to do from our kids' standpoint is come up with a way that we can quarantine or isolate the positive cases until we get some kind of resolution." – Gov. Jim Justice

"We need to test now every single person that goes on the WVU campus – everyone – and what we need to do from our kids' standpoint is come up with a way that we can quarantine or isolate the positive cases until we get some kind of resolution," Justice said. "And then how we count them is another animal unto itself, but we need to do what is medically right first."

Another place Justice is concerned about is Fayette County, where the whitewater rafting season is under way, because he has received reports that people involved with rafting are failing to take enough precautions against spreading the coronavirus.

“That’s a real problem, Fayette County, and really and truly, we’re not going to do that,” he said. “We’re just plain not going to do that. So absolutely, you need to tighten yourselves down and pay attention to what I’m saying.”

Justice said the people who would participate in the meeting with him and his staff late this afternoon would include: Marsh; DHHR Secretary Bill Crouch; Dr. Ayne Amjad, state public health officer; Maj. Gen. James Hoyer of the West Virginia National Guard; state school Supt. Clayton Burch; and Bernie Dolan, executive director of the Secondary School Activities Commission.

On other matters, Justice said:

- Mount Olive Correctional Complex is down to 25 inmates and 18 employees who are positive.
- Beckley Correctional Center has no new cases among inmates, while seven employees are positive.
- The state has sent out \$15 million in small business grants.
- The state has sent out almost \$110 million in grants to cities and counties.



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