



News Release

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**COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations surging;  
Safety precautions needed to safeguard Nebraska's health care system**

**For Immediate Release**

**(COLUMBUS, Neb.)** – COVID-19 isn't going anywhere. In recent weeks, both local and statewide COVID-19 cases have surged.

According to [coronavirus.nebraska.gov](http://coronavirus.nebraska.gov), as of November 12, Nebraska had a total of 87,733 cases with 49,761 recoveries so that means about 38,000 Nebraskans currently have active cases of COVID-19. Along with this increase in cases, has come an increase in hospitalizations. According to a press release from Gov. Pete Ricketts, six weeks ago the state had 200 COVID-19-related hospitalizations, but this week that number has increased to 860.

At this point, Nebraska's hospitals have had adequate resources to care for COVID-19 patients along with their usual patient loads. However, as COVID-19 hospitalizations increase in conjunction with an expected rise in influenza-related hospitalizations, it will put increased stress on the state's health care resources.

"The situation in our hospitals is very serious," Ricketts said in the release. "The coronavirus not only continues to spread in Nebraska, it has picked up steam...So far, we have been able to provide hospital beds, ICU beds, and ventilators to anyone who needs care. If trends continue, Nebraska will reach a point where that's no longer possible."

To ensure Nebraska does not reach that point, Ricketts urged Nebraskans to take the recommended safety precautions to curb the spread of the virus – such as masking; social distancing; hand-washing and avoiding the three Cs: crowds, close contact and confined spaces.

"Right now, there's an urgent need for all of us to take personal responsibility for slowing the spread by using the tools we have to protect our health care system," he said.

**Local Case Numbers**

On a local level, there has also been a sharp uptick in cases and hospitalizations in recent weeks.

On November 12, the East Central District Health Department (ECDHD)'s website was reporting that there were 3,777 total positive cases in its four-county district that includes Boone, Colfax, Nance and Platte County.



They reported there were 30 hospitalized patients in the district with one intensive care unit bed available. According to the risk dials on their website, all four counties in the district were rated as having a severe risk of spread.

As of November 13, CCH was caring for 20 COVID-19 positive patients. The hospital had a total three negative pressure rooms available in the ACU/ICU/3<sup>rd</sup> Floor and four negative pressure rooms available in the Maternal Child Health Department. CCH had eight additional medical/surgical beds and two additional ICU beds available for patient admission. Staffing across the hospital remains safe and adequate.

### **Current DHMs and Avoiding the Three Cs**

Due to the increase in hospitalizations across the state, Ricketts issued new directed health measures in recent weeks. These most recent DHMs will remain in effect until November 30, or later, if necessary.

The measures require masks in any indoor business where staff and patrons are within six feet of each other for 15 consecutive minutes or more. Six feet of separation is also required between parties at businesses, bars, restaurants, churches, gyms and other gatherings, such as weddings and funerals. Indoor gatherings are reduced to 25% occupancy, while outdoor gatherings remain at 100% of rated occupancy. Attendance at youth extracurricular activities, whether they are school or club sponsored, has been reduced to only the household members of participants.

In addition to instituting these DHMs, Ricketts also encouraged Nebraskans to follow the three Cs of avoiding crowds, close contact and confined spaces. Over the past several weeks, health departments across the state have reported that many COVID-19 cases stem from informal gatherings like birthday parties or baby showers. To avoid further spread of the virus, people are urged to avoid gatherings of this kind where they can't maintain six feet of distance from individuals outside of their household. Instead, people are encouraged to socialize outdoors when possible and, in general avoid prolonged, face-to-face interaction with people who do not live in their household.

### **CCH Reaffirms Benefits of Masks**

This week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reaffirmed the benefit of masks in reducing the spread of COVID-19.

According to the CDC, COVID-19 is spread mainly from person to person through respiratory droplets, which are produced when people cough, sneeze or talk. Research has shown that these droplets usually travel about 6 feet. They can then enter the mouths or noses of people nearby or be inhaled into the lungs.

In a recent update, the CDC noted that while the primary benefit of masks is that they reduce the exhalation of these droplets, another benefit is that masks may also reduce the inhalation of these droplets. In general, that means that when people wear masks, they are not just protecting others from COVID-19, they are protecting themselves as well. In this update, the CDC also noted that masks are more effective in reducing the spread of the virus when more people use them "consistently and correctly."



The CDC recommends people older than 2 years old wear masks or cloth face coverings in public, especially in places where social distancing is hard to enforce such as in pharmacies, grocery stores and at gas stations. Masks can be made from household materials such as t-shirts and towels. For instructions on how to make masks as well as the most up-to-date mask guidelines from the CDC, visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

The benefits of masks are not just health-related. In that same update, the CDC reported that “increasing universal masking by 15% could prevent the need for lockdowns and reduce associated losses of up to \$1 trillion or about 5% of gross domestic product.” To read the full CDC update, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/more/masking-science-sars-cov2.html>.

### **Expanded TestNebraska Hours/Contact Tracing**

CCH continues to offer COVID-19 testing through its TestNebraska testing site that recently moved to its winter location at 4171 48th Avenue (the Husker Helicopter site location directly north of CCH).

In addition to its regular testing times of 9 a.m. to noon on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, CCH will also be offering COVID-19 tests from 9 a.m. to noon on Saturday, November 14 and Saturday, November 21. Also, starting on Monday, November 9, CCH increased its hourly rate of TestNebraska tests, allowing them to process as many as 50 tests an hour.

Sample collection through CCH’s TestNebraska site takes no more than five minutes. People will be contacted via email with test results within about 72 hours. Individuals who are having symptoms of COVID-19 and would like to be tested through Test Nebraska, must register online at <https://www.testnebraska.com/en>. After registering through Test Nebraska, people will receive a QR code and be assigned a testing appointment at CCH.

In coming months, when winter weather becomes an issue, CCH will be closing its TestNebraska outpatient collection site if the local Columbus schools decide to close.

Individuals who receive a positive COVID-19 test through TestNebraska will be contacted by a contact tracer so that their close contacts can be notified and quarantine as necessary. This is an important step in reducing the spread of the virus.

### **Additional Resources**

For more information on COVID-19 or how CCH is handling the situation in our community, visit the “Coronavirus (COVID-19) Information and Resources for Community Members” page at [www.columbushosp.org](http://www.columbushosp.org), call 402-564-7118 or check out CCH on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram.

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