



News Release

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Date: October 23, 2020

**State and Local COVID-19 Cases and Hospitalizations Surge;  
Health Officials Strongly Urge Mask Use to Prevent Further Strain on Health Care Resources**

**For Immediate Release**

**(COLUMBUS, Neb.)** – State and local cases of COVID-19 have increased in recent weeks and COVID-19 hospitalizations in Nebraska have reached an all-time high this month.

As of October 21, Gov. Pete Ricketts reported that Nebraska has 38% of its hospital beds, 33% of its intensive care unit beds and 81% of its ventilators available. However, with flu season approaching, it becomes increasingly important for Nebraskans to take simple steps to reduce the spread of COVID-19 to ensure the availability of health care resources.

That's why the state has instituted new directed health measures that went into effect on Wednesday, October 21, and on a local level, area health care officials are urging people to wear masks.

**State and Local Case Numbers**

According to [coronavirus.nebraska.gov](http://coronavirus.nebraska.gov), there have been about 60,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Nebraska with about 40,000 recoveries which means there are about 20,000 active cases of COVID-19 in the state.

On a local level, the East Central District Health Department (ECDHD) reported the following number of cases for its four-county region, as of October 22:

- Boone County had 136 cases
- Colfax County had 882 cases
- Nance County had 76 cases, and
- Platte County had 1,460 cases

The ECDHD reported that there were 13 patients hospitalized with COVID-19 in their district.

As of October 23, Columbus Community Hospital was caring for 12 COVID-19 positive patients and one person under investigation for COVID-19. Thirteen of its negative pressure rooms were in use.

**New Directed Health Measures**

In light of the increased COVID-19 hospitalization numbers, the governor's office is allocating \$40 million in CARES funds to help hospitals increase their nursing and respiratory therapy staff. These funds are also intended to support increased screening of incoming patients and provide funds to pay current staff to begin working additional shifts.



Along with this, the state has also instituted new directed health measures (DHMs) that went into effect Wednesday, October 21:

#### **Elective Surgeries/Procedures**

- In order to continue elective procedures, hospitals must maintain at least 10% of their staffed general and ICU beds as reserve capacity to treat coronavirus patients.
  - Hospitals must continue to accept and treat COVID-19 patients and must not transfer COVID-19 patients to create capacity for elective procedures.
  - Hospitals may also submit a surge plan to continue to perform elective surgeries.

#### **Gatherings**

- Indoor gatherings will be limited to 50% of rated occupancy (not to exceed 10,000). This is scaled back from the previous cap of 75%.
- Outdoor gatherings will remain at 100% of rated occupancy (not to exceed 10,000).
- Groups shall be no larger than eight (8) individuals.
- Plans must still be submitted to local health departments and approved for all gatherings of 500+ (1,000+ in Douglas County).

#### **Bars and Restaurants**

- Patrons will be required to be seated unless they are placing an order, using the restroom, or playing games.
- 100% of rated occupancy continues.
- Maximum of eight (8) individuals in a party (groups larger than eight (8) will need to split into multiple tables).

#### **Wedding and Funeral Reception Venues**

- Maximum of eight (8) individuals in a party (groups larger than eight (8) will need to split into multiple tables).
- 100% of rated occupancy continues.

These are the only changes to the DHMs so gyms, salons and religious services are able to continue operating at 100% occupancy though people at these establishments are urged to practice social distancing and wear masks or face coverings.

#### **Nebraskans Urged to Practice Safety Precautions**

State and local health officials are urging people to practice simple safety measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and its associated strain on health care resources. For example, the governor's office has asked people to avoid the three Cs of COVID-19 spread: crowded places, close contact and confined spaces.

That means people should avoid gathering in groups when they can't maintain six feet of distance from others and if it is not possible to maintain that distance, they should wear a mask. People should also avoid enclosed spaces with poor ventilation.



On a local level, representatives from 15 area health care organizations – including CCH and the ECDHD – recently joined together to write an op-ed encouraging local residents to do simple things to help reduce the spread, including:

- Wear a mask whenever you are in public.
- Frequently wash your hands, using soap and water, for a minimum of 20 seconds.
- Use hand sanitizer with a minimum of 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
- Frequently clean shared spaces.
- Maintain a distance of at least six feet from anyone outside your household.

People who are quarantined or self-isolating should take the following steps to prevent or limit the spread of COVID-19:

- Stay home except to get medical care.
- Separate yourself from other people in your home.

They noted that following these safety measures – especially wearing a mask – is the best way to prevent others from getting sick, keep schools open, continue elective surgeries and procedures, ensure you do not get others sick and safeguard the state’s health care resources for the upcoming flu season.

Masks or face coverings are a particularly important tool in preventing the spread of COVID-19, because COVID-19 is spread mainly from person to person through respiratory droplets which are produced when people cough, sneeze or talk. When used in conjunction with social distancing, masks are an extra layer of protection that trap these respiratory droplets and prevent them from traveling into the air and onto other people.

People should choose masks that completely cover their mouth and nose; have two or more layers of washable, breathable fabric; and fit snugly against the side of their face so there are not gaps. They should avoid masks that have exhalation valves or vents.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (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.

Additionally, local residents are urged to get a flu shot as soon as possible to reduce the number of hospitalizations from influenza. Annual flu shots are recommended for everyone 6 months of age and older, especially for those who are at high risk of developing flu-related complications.

#### **COVID-19 Testing Through TestNebraska**

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).

TestNebraska appointments are available on Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. Sample collection takes no more than five minutes. People will be contacted via email with test results within about 72 hours. People 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 to decide to close.

**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), or check out CCH on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram.

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