

State sees virus case total rise by 10,405

One in 35 people tested as positive

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ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Coronavirus daily updates

As of 10:40 p.m. Friday

323,275,725

Worldwide cases

64,897,435

U.S. cases

664,194

Arkansas cases

5,529,043

Worldwide deaths

849,172

U.S. deaths

9,413

Arkansas deaths

Vaccination numbers

Arkansans 5 and older are eligible for covid-19 vaccination.

Ages 5 and up are eligible for Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. Ages 18 and up are eligible for Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines.

4,758,970

Arkansas doses received

3,803,553

Arkansas doses given

For covid-19 vaccination appointments or related matters, call the Arkansas Department of Health's scheduling hot line at (800)803-7847, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily.

Health Department clinics are listed at

<https://www.healthy.arkansas.gov/programs-services/topics/adh-covid-19-vaccine-clinics>

Non-department clinics can be found at <https://bit.ly/3q45Noe>

SOURCES: Center for Systems Science and Engineering, Arkansas Department of Health
Arkansas Democrat-Gazette

New coronavirus cases in Arkansas totaled 10,405 Friday, down from the total of new cases from the day before, but active cases set another record at 85,812 —

meaning that roughly 1 in 35 Arkansans have tested positive for the virus.

The state reported that 1,309 patients were hospitalized with the virus. It was the sixth consecutive day of hospitalizations topping 1,000, and with an increase of 58 patients from Thursday, the 15th consecutive day of double-digit increases.

“After ordering 1.5 million at-home tests we have received over 1 million of them,” Gov. Asa Hutchinson said on social media. “This should alleviate the shortage at our community pickup locations. We will continue increasing our hospital space and providing resources where they are needed.” Hutchinson referred to the 1.5 million rapid at-home tests purchased by the state last month using \$10 million in grant money from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The state has received three shipments of the iHealth tests so far: 211,000 Monday, 393,000 Tuesday and 393,120 Thursday.

“We are expecting another 393,120 sometime over the weekend and another 100,000 next week,” said Dr. Jennifer Dillaha, the Health Department’s chief medical officer.

Health Department local health units, public libraries and other locations Monday began distributing the rapid home covid-19 tests for free.

With the new cases added Friday, Arkansas has had a cumulative tally of 664,194 cases since the pandemic began.

“It’s very likely that our case numbers are higher because some at-home tests are not being reported,” Dillaha said.

The state reported 12,990 cases Thursday. But Friday’s count was nearly 2,000 more than what was reported a week ago, or 8,434 cases Jan. 7.

There were 21,338 tests reported Friday. The current positivity rate of the tests is 32.8%, Health Department spokeswoman Danyelle Mc-Neill said.

Omicron is believed to be the dominant variant in the state now, Dillaha said.

“Sequencing is a slower process, and there is a lag time,” she said. “We are not yet seeing this in our weekly variant report but with how quickly cases are growing, the omicron variant is likely the reason.” The state’s death toll from the

virus since March 2020 rose by 23 to 9,413, as tracked by the Health Department.

CARE FACILITY CASES

The number of covid-19 cases in nursing homes and assisted living facilities in the state has multiplied by nearly five times since the end of December, according to Health Department data.

About 75 of the 315 facilities tracked by the state have had at least one new covid-19 case within the past two weeks — that's 48 more facilities than the 27 reported Dec. 28.

The total number of cases within the past 14 days grew from 98 at the end of December to 479 currently.

The number of residents who had tested positive for covid-19 grew from 45 in December to 158 this week, while covid-positive health care workers at the facilities grew from 53 to 321 during the same time period.

Rachel E. Bunch, executive director of the Arkansas Health Care Association and Arkansas Assisted Living Association, said the facility numbers are high because the rate of community spread is so high due to the omicron variant.

“Although many of the long-term-care staff members have been vaccinated and boosted, there are still breakthrough cases with mild or no symptoms,” Bunch said.

“Because long-term-care facility staff members are required to test routinely, as often as twice per week, many of these asymptomatic positives are identified.” Thirty-seven of the care facilities had five or more active cases this week, while 17 had 10 or more.

By comparison, on Dec. 28 only seven facilities had five or more active cases, while two had 10 or more.

The top five facilities with the highest number of active cases were Springs of Jonesboro in Craighead County, 33; Woodlawn Heights in Independence County, 22; Good Shepherd Community in Pulaski County, 21; The Woods of

Monticello Health and Rehabilitation in Drew County, 19; and Heather Manor Rehabilitation in Hempstead County, 16.

Bunch said the facilities continue to urge individuals — the staff and the community at large — to vaccinate, safely distance from others, wear masks and stay home if they are sick or have been around an individual who is sick.

“We encourage family members to be patient and understanding with facilities and their staff members, and to refrain from visiting if they are sick, have been around someone that is sick, or were in a situation that might have resulted in an exposure to covid,” Bunch said.

Visitation to the facilities has not been restricted as a result of the current surge, Bunch added.

“I’m talking to family members across the state,” said Martha Deaver, president of Arkansas Advocates for Nursing Home Residents. “They are following all of the new [Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services] visitation guidelines and are devastated to see new cases in their facilities.” Deaver blamed the surge in the facilities partly on unvaccinated staff members.

“Employees need to be fully vaccinated before caring for our most frail and vulnerable citizens. Some employees have let down their guard,” she said. “There are many employees who left because they did not want to be vaccinated.” Infection control protocols should be increased and monitored for compliance, Deaver said, adding that if they aren’t, “nursing home residents who have many serious health care issues will not survive. They say omicron is less harmful. It will not be less harmful for many nursing home residents.” The state’s five human development centers, which house more than 800 people with developmental and other disabilities, had 129 active cases — compared with 13 cases at the end of December, according to the Health Department report.

The Conway Human Development Center, the largest of the five with 518 beds, had the highest infection rate with 93 cases, consisting of 32 residents and 61 employees.

On Dec. 28, the Conway center had 11 cases.

The Jonesboro facility, with 109 licensed beds, had 22 cases, consisting of four residents and 18 employee cases. The facility had two cases at the end of December.

The Booneville Human Development Center, which is licensed for 138 residents, had 10 employee cases and no resident cases.

The Southeast Arkansas Human Development Center in Warren, with 100 licensed beds, had four employee cases and no resident cases.

The Arkadelphia facility, with 125 licensed beds, did not have any active cases.

The Booneville, Warren and Arkadelphia facilities did not have any active cases as of Dec. 28.

PSYCHIATRIC FACILITIES

According to the Health Department report, 22 behavioral health facilities had 243 covid-19 cases in the past 14 days, compared with six facilities and 17 cases at the end of December.

Eleven of the facilities had five or more active cases this week, while eight had 10 or more.

Perimeter Behavioral Health of Forrest City had 62 cases, with 35 among staff members and 27 among patients; followed by Perimeter Behavioral Hospital in West Memphis, which had 35 cases, consisting of 27 staff members and eight patients; Arkansas Health Center in Benton had 31 cases, consisting of 29 staff members and two patients; Centers for Youth and Families Inc. had 22 cases, consisting of 19 staff members and three patients; and Birch Tree Communities in Benton had 18 cases, consisting of 16 staff members and two patients.

The Arkansas State Hospital, the only state-operated acute psychiatric inpatient hospital, had two cases, both patients. The hospital has 222 patient beds.

VACCINATIONS

The number of vaccine doses that providers reported having administered rose by 8,077 to 3,803,553.

The number of individuals fully immunized increased by 1,710, to a total of 1,525,406, or 53.6%, of Arkansans ages 5 and older. The number of Arkansans partially immunized against the virus increased by 992, to 368,264, or 12.9%, of the population ages 5 and older.

As of Friday, 483,064 third vaccine doses had been administered.

COUNTY CASES

Pulaski County had the most new cases with 1,448 Friday, followed by Benton County with 787 and Washington County with 555.

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