

Records set 3rd day; cases up 2,940

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ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Coronavirus daily updates

As of 10:40 p.m. Wednesday

204,661,668

Worldwide cases

36,185,761

U.S. cases

410,832

Arkansas cases

4,323,778

Worldwide deaths

618,454

U.S. deaths

6,366

Arkansas deaths

Vaccination numbers

Arkansans 12 and older are eligible for covid-19 vaccination.

Ages 12 and up are eligible for Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. Ages 18 and up are eligible for Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines.

3,068,320

Arkansas doses received

2,469,354

Arkansas doses given

For covid-19 vaccination appointments or related matters, call the Arkansas Department of Health's scheduling hot line at (800) 985-6030, 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

The number of coronavirus patients in hospitals, on ventilators and in intensive care in Arkansas all rose to new highs Wednesday as the state's count of cases jumped by 2,940.

The number in hospitals rose by 11, to 1,446, while the number on ventilators rose by two, to 296.

After dipping Tuesday, the number of covid-19 patients in intensive care rose by five, to 512, topping the previous record of 509 reached on Monday.

The state death toll from the virus, as tracked by the Department of Health rose by 20, to 6,366.

"Our COVID-19 report shows a continued upward trend in cases," Gov. Asa Hutchinson said in a tweet.

"We need our vaccinations to outpace the growth in cases. We've passed the 1.1 million mark in vaccinations. Let's use wisely the coming days before school starts." Since Monday, the number of covid-19 patients hospitalized and on ventilators in Arkansas have been above their previous peaks, in January, of 1,371 for the number in hospitals and 268 for the number on ventilators.

Despite the increase in the number of patients in intensive care, however, the number of ICU beds that were unoccupied statewide rose by two, to 14.

That reflected the opening of eight additional ICU beds, bringing the total number in the state to 1,137, and one additional non-covid patient who was in intensive care.

Covid-19 patients made up about 46% of all the state's patients in intensive care, up slightly from about 45% a day earlier.

The increase in cases was larger by 102 than the one the previous Wednesday.

As a result, the average daily increase in the state's case count over a rolling seven-day period rose to 2,339, which was still short of the nearly seven-month high it reached the week ending Saturday.

With new cases outpacing recoveries, the number of cases in the state that were considered active rose by 838, to 24,215, its highest level since Jan. 17.

“The numbers are worrisome,” state Epidemiologist Jennifer Dillaha said. “They are moving in the wrong direction.” According to rankings from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Arkansas had the country’s fourth-highest number of new cases per capita, behind Louisiana, Florida and Mississippi, during the seven-day span ending Tuesday.

Arkansas’ number of covid-19 deaths per capita during the week was the country’s third-highest, behind Louisiana and Nevada.

RECORD BROKEN

Hospitals in Washington and Benton counties had a record 173 covid-19 patients on Wednesday, surpassing the previous record of 165 set last week, a coalition of health care providers said in a statement.

The average age of the patients was 43, and the youngest was under 12, the providers said.

Only 9% of the patients who were eligible to receive a coronavirus vaccine had been vaccinated.

“With the rise in cases and K-12 schools, colleges, and universities reconvening for their fall semesters we are very concerned,” the providers said in the statement.

“Without clear safety measures in place for many, the reality of cases rising even more and our children and unprotected populations getting sick is a very real concern.” The coalition includes Washington Regional Medical System, Mercy Health System, Northwest Health System, Arkansas Children’s Northwest, the Veterans Health Care System of the Ozarks, the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences Northwest Regional Campus and Community Clinic.

In Little Rock, UAMS Medical Center had 64 covid-19 patients, including 26 who were in intensive care, 15 who were on ventilators and three who were on heart-lung bypass machines, spokeswoman Leslie Taylor said.

“We had another death, so we’ve had six patients die in the last week,” she said.

Nine of the patients hospitalized as of Wednesday had been fully vaccinated, she said.

With a few exceptions, such as for trauma and stroke, she said the hospital was not accepting transfers of patients from other hospitals.

Conway Regional Medical Center had 37 covid-19 patients, including 13 who were on ventilators, according to a video update from Conway Regional Health System President and CEO Matt Troup.

He said the census is in line with the winter peak and is continually climbing.

About 88% of covid-positive patients are unvaccinated, Troup said.

“The data point to a reality, a fact, that is well recognized in our medical community, is that vaccinations reduce the symptoms of this virus. You’re much less likely to be admitted to the hospital,” Troup said. “So again, I plead, I ask each of you who have not been vaccinated, to consider the evidence. Go get vaccinated. Talk to your doctor. Talk to your medical provider. Again, get that done right away, particularly because we’re looking at a fall where we could see an even greater surge of covid-positive patients.”

VACCINATED BUT INFECTED

According to the Health Department’s online corona-virus dashboard, infections of fully vaccinated people accounted for just 9.5% of the state’s cases since Feb. 1 but about 15.3% of the cases that were active as of Wednesday.

“That’s concerning, and for that reason I’m really pleased that the CDC changed their mask guidance so that people who are fully vaccinated should be wearing masks when they are out in public or in indoor spaces,” Dillaha said.

“We are seeing people who are getting infected and having symptoms, and the data shows that they can spread it similar to someone who is not fully vaccinated.” She said people who are fully vaccinated have “substantial protection” from the virus, but should still take precautions such as wearing a mask when in public and avoiding crowds and places where people are likely to be unvaccinated and not wearing masks.

“I’ve heard a lot of people who have been fully vaccinated and they got very mild symptoms, just they felt like their sinuses were bothering them or they had a stuffy nose,” she said.

Even those with mild symptoms could end up inadvertently passing the virus on to other people, however.

The dashboard also showed that 7.6% of the state’s hospitalizations for covid-19 and 9.1% of its deaths from the virus since Feb. 1 have been among people who were fully vaccinated.

CARE FACILITIES

According to a Health Department report, 113 nursing homes and assisted living facilities in the state had had at least one new covid-19 case within the past two weeks as of Monday.

That was up 19 facilities from a week earlier, when 94 nursing homes and assisted living facilities had at least one case.

The cases totaled 415, with the majority, 262, coming from afflicted staff members.

The cases are on the rise, growing by 91 cases from 324 cases a week earlier.

Twenty-six homes had five or more new cases, while nine had 10 or more.

Somerset Senior Living in Yellville had the most, 30, followed by Spring Creek Health and Rehabilitation, 21; Van Buren Healthcare and Rehabilitation Center in Van Buren, 21; Greene Acres Nursing Home in Paragould, 14; St. John’s Place of Arkansas in Fordyce, 14; Wood-Lawn Heights in Batesville, 13; Trinity Village Medical Center in Pine Bluff, 11; Windsor Cottage in Texarkana, 11; and Mountain Meadows Health and Rehabilitation in Batesville, 10.

Martha Deaver, president of Arkansas Advocates for Nursing Home Residents, said the escalation of covid-19 cases in the care homes is not surprising.

“I am furious that nursing home residents are being held prisoners in these nursing homes because of the failures of the nursing home owners to make sure their employees are vaccinated,” Deaver said.

Rachel E. Bunch, executive director of the Arkansas Health Care Association and Arkansas Assisted Living Association, said that while visitation is determined by covid-19 numbers, compassionate care visits continue to be permitted at all times.

Deaver pointed to a recent Government Accountability Office report that showed out of 13,316 nursing homes studied that had outbreaks, 65% — or 8,720 — originated with a covid-positive staff member.

“Family members are calling me daily complaining that they have been denied visitation because employees are coming down with a new variant,” she said.

Deaver cited a recent call to action from the American Healthcare Association supporting all long term care providers that adopt mandatory covid-19 vaccination policies for their health care personnel.

“This should have been done before now. They are continuing to show a total disregard for the lives of our most frail and vulnerable citizens,” Deaver said. “The nursing home residents are paying the price because we are going backwards and not forward because we are not learning from our deadly mistakes.” Bunch said that the individual facilities make decisions about vaccine mandates.

“Some facilities mandate, others encourage, but regardless, the priority remains providing education about vaccines to staff,” Bunch said.

Arkansas facilities are still the highest-ranking in vaccines for both staff and residents among states with colleges in the NCAA’s Southeastern Conference, she added.

Bunch said about 82.3% of current residents are vaccinated while 58.8% of healthcare personnel in the facilities have been vaccinated.

According to data Bunch provided, four of the state’s 225 nursing homes are reporting that 100% of their residents have been vaccinated. Two facilities say 100% of their staff are vaccinated.

There are 189 nursing homes that have 70% or more of their residents vaccinated and 69 facilities have 70% or more of their staff vaccinated.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT CENTERS

The state's five human development centers, which house more than 800 people with developmental and other disabilities, had 29 active cases and 149 patients and staff members in quarantine, according to a Department of Human Services report.

"We understand that the Delta variant is more easily transmissible so we are doing everything we can to limit the spread at our centers, including ensuring staff is wearing and has access to the proper personal protective equipment, ensuring infection control protocol is followed, and we have limited visitation," department spokeswoman Amy Webb said in an email. "Compassionate care visits are still allowed." Of the total cases, eight are among residents and 21 are among staff members. Those under quarantine comprise 130 residents and 19 staff members.

The Conway Human Development Center, the largest of the five with 518 beds, has the highest infection rate with 14 cases including three residents and 11 employees. The facility has 70 under quarantine, including 60 residents and 10 employees.

The Booneville Human Development Center, which is licensed for 138 residents, has 11 cases that include four residents and seven employees. The facility has 74 under quarantine, including 70 residents and four staff members.

The Arkadelphia facility, with 125 licensed beds, has two cases, all staff members. One employee is under quarantine.

The Jonesboro facility, with 109 licensed beds, has two cases, all staff members. There are two employees under quarantine.

The Southeast Arkansas Human Development Center in Warren, with 100 licensed beds, does not have any active cases, but two employees are under quarantine.

The majority of the residents at the human development centers are vaccinated, with the Booneville and Jonesboro centers achieving a 100% vaccination rate for its residents, according to Department of Human Services data.

The Arkadelphia center has 98% of its residents vaccinated followed by the Warren facility at 94% and the Conway center with 90%.

About 80% of the Arkadelphia center staff are vaccinated, followed by Jonesboro with 68%, Booneville with 55% and Conway with 51%.

PRISON CASES

The prison system has 124 active cases, Cindy Murphy, spokeswoman for the Arkansas Department of Corrections, said.

Murphy said 10 facilities have covid-19 cases.

“As more offenders and staff see first hand that COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective, we’re seeing an increased comfort level. We’re working to encourage offender vaccination with commissary incentives and by distributing educational materials,” Murphy said in an email. “At the same time, we remain vigilant at our centers and units with ongoing mitigation efforts, such as reduced movement, masking and enhanced sanitation, and we’re working to upgrade air-sanitizing technology that will eliminate COVID-19 and other viruses.” According to a Health Department report Monday, the Ouachita River Unit in Malvern has the highest number of cases, with 37 inmates who tested positive in the past 14 days. No staff cases were reported for the facility.

The Northeast Arkansas Community Corrections Center in Osceola had 16 inmates test positive, but no staff members.

The Omega Supervision Sanction Center in Malvern had 10 inmates test positive, but no staff members.

All other facilities had three or fewer cases, according to the Health Department report.

Murphy said that 8,728, or 55.7%, offenders and 2,606, or 58.7%, Department of Correction employees have been vaccinated.

An additional 964 offenders have agreed to get the vaccine during the month of August, Murphy said.

CASES BY COUNTY

Dillaha said all but five of the deaths reported Wednesday happened within the past month.

Of the others, two occurred in January, one was in March and two happened in May.

She said 16.3% of the state's coronavirus tests were positive during the seven-day span ending Tuesday, down from 16.6% the week ending Friday.

Hutchinson has said he wants to keep the rate below 10%.

Washington County had the most new cases on Wednesday, 363, followed by Pulaski County, which had 313, and Benton County, which had 229.

The state's cumulative count of cases rose to 410,832.

The number of people who have ever been hospitalized in the state with confirmed infections rose by 102, to 19,564.

The number who have ever been on a ventilator rose by six, to 1,983.

VACCINATIONS UP

Meanwhile, at 11,315, the increase on Wednesday in vaccine doses that providers reported having administered, including second doses of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, was larger by 159 than the one the previous Wednesday.

After dipping Tuesday, the average number of doses administered each day over a rolling seven-day period rose to 10,217, which was still short of the recent high of 12,950 a day it reached the week ending Monday.

According to the CDC, the number of Arkansans who had received at least one vaccine dose rose by 7,530, to 1,497,866, or about 49.6% of the state's population.

The number who had been fully vaccinated rose by 4,379, to 1,142,832, or about 37.9% of the population.

Among the states and District of Columbia, Arkansas continued to rank 40th in the percentage of its residents who had received at least one vaccine dose.

In the percentage of its residents who had been fully vaccinated, it moved up from being essentially tied with Louisiana for having the 47th-highest percentage to 46th, ahead of Louisiana as well as Idaho, Wyoming, Mississippi and Alabama.

REWARDS DISTRIBUTED

Hutchinson announced in late May that Arkansans who received a vaccine dose May 26 or after would be eligible for one of two rewards: a \$20 scratch-off lottery ticket or a pair of gift certificates for hunting and fishing licenses worth a total of \$21.

Scott Hardin, a spokesman for the state Department of Finance and Administration, said the number of people who had claimed winnings from one of the tickets rose last week by 607, to 3,209.

So far, one person, a Texas man who had been visiting relatives in Arkansas, has won \$1 million from one of the tickets.

The other winnings, in amounts ranging from \$20 to \$500, rose last week by \$23,450, to \$139,020.

One more \$1 million ticket remained in circulation in the game, known as the \$1 Million Spectacular, along with one \$50,000 prize and two \$10,000 prizes.

People can claim the rewards at vaccination clinics organized by the Health Department or the Arkansas Foundation for Medical Care or by taking their vaccination cards to one of the department's local health units.

Health Department spokeswoman Danyelle McNeill said 12,650 people had received lottery tickets and 5,532 had received gift certificates as of Wednesday.

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