

## *West Virginia Update*

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### West Virginia Cases Increase Almost 1,100

The West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources reported today the state has recorded 16 more deaths from COVID-19 in the past day, raising the total to 639. The latest to die included: a 77-year-old woman from Kanawha County, a 71-year-old man from Kanawha County, a 75-year-old man from Jackson County, an 83-year-old man from Marshall County, a 70-year-old man from Logan County, a 59-year-old woman from Boone County, a 74-year-old woman from Lincoln County, a 72-year-old man from Monroe County, a 92-year-old woman from Ohio County, a 79-year-old man from Marion County, an 85-year-old woman from Mineral County, a 79-year-old man from Fayette County, a 68-year-old woman from Summers County, a 95-year-old woman from Summers County, a 74-year-old man from Pleasants County and an 85-year-old man from Hampshire County.

Kanawha County leads the state with the most deaths with 133. Other counties with deaths include: Logan with 50; Cabell with 47; Mercer with 37; Fayette with 32; Putnam with 28; Jackson with 26; Berkeley with 21; Ohio with 16; Harrison, Jefferson and Raleigh with 15 each; Mingo, Wayne and Wood with 14 each; Boone with 13; Marshall with 12; Wetzel with 11; Grant and Monroe with nine each; Brooke and Taylor with eight each; Monongalia, Summers and Wyoming with seven each; Greenbrier, Marion, Mason and Preston with six each; Mineral with five; Barbour, Hancock, Nicholas, Pleasants and Upshur with four each; Clay, Lincoln and

Roane with three each; Doddridge, Hampshire, Lewis and Randolph with two each; and Hardy, McDowell, Pendleton, Ritchie and Wirt with one each.

DHHR's dashboard today shows West Virginia has reached 38,480 total cases, an increase of 1,081 in the past day. That includes 33,668 confirmed and 4,812 probable cases. The number of active cases is 12,1773 with 402 of them hospitalized, 120 in intensive care and 51 on ventilators. Out of 989,560 total tests, 951,080 have come back negative. The cumulative level of positive tests compared to the total number of tests is 3.42 percent. The daily positive rate is 4.77 percent.

Among West Virginia's counties, Kanawha is in the lead with 5,024 cases. Others with at least 1,000 cases include: Monongalia with 2,948; Berkeley with 2,544; Cabell with 2,421; Wood with 1,950; Putnam with 1,550; Raleigh with 1,333; Ohio with 1,219; Mercer with 1,163; Jefferson with 1,093; Fayette with 1,023; and Harrison with 1,019. Those with at least 500 cases include: Logan with 965; Marshall with 961; Mingo with 889; Wayne with 871; Mineral with 798; Marion with 667; Jackson with 636; Randolph with 599; Wyoming with 584; Boone with 559; and McDowell with 557. Those with at least 200 cases include: Brooke with 483; Hancock with 474; Preston with 420; Upshur with 410; Lincoln with 375; Greenbrier with 361; Wetzel with 352; Monroe with 321; Barbour with 312; Mason with 309; Nicholas with 291; Grant with 267; Hampshire and Taylor with 246 each; and Summers with 242. Those with at least 100 cases include: Hardy with 181; Gilmer with 180; Roane with 144; Tyler with 116; Ritchie with 107; and Clay with 104. Those with at least 50 cases include: Braxton with 99; Doddridge and Tucker with 98 each; Pendleton with 90; Pocahontas with 89; Wirt with 77; Pleasants with 66; Calhoun with 53; and Webster with 51. No county is left with fewer than 50 cases.

DHHR reports whites make up 66.9 percent of cases, blacks make up 3.6 percent and others make up 29.5 percent.

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

## DHHR Map Shows Six Red and 14 Orange Counties

The daily County Alert System map from the Department of Health and Human Resources shows six red counties today. They include: Berkeley, Hardy, Jackson, Marshall, Mineral, and Wood.

The 14 orange counties on today's map include: Barbour, Boone, Brooke, Cabell, Hampshire, Hancock, Jefferson, Mason, Morgan, Ohio, Putnam, Wayne, Wirt and Wyoming.

Another 13 counties are gold: Clay, Grant, Harrison, Kanawha, Lincoln, Mingo, Monroe, Nicholas, Preston, Ritchie, Taylor, Upshur and Wetzel.

Twelve counties are yellow on today's map: Calhoun, Fayette, Greenbrier, Logan, Marion, McDowell, Mercer, Monongalia, Pleasants, Raleigh, Tyler and Upshur. All other counties are green.

Red is for counties with the highest level of COVID-19 cases. Orange is the next level down, followed by gold, yellow and green.

## Governor Worries Worst Is Yet to Come

Gov. Jim Justice is trying to avoid imposing further restrictions on West Virginians beyond having them wear masks indoor, but he said today in his COVID-19 briefing it's getting harder to avoid doing that.

"This thing is getting worse, and I truly believe that it's going to get worse before it gets better," he said. "Our health experts tell us all the time and give us medical knowledge that we're not trained in, and for God sakes, if we don't listen to them, we're idiots. You know, we have to listen to them."

Justice said experts accurately said the coronavirus attacks people of all ages but is especially hard on the elderly.

"We're not moving toward shutting anything down at any place at this time, but absolutely, this thing is trending, and it is trending badly," he said while holding a mask. "We have got to absolutely do all within our power, and what is in your power today is this mask."

*"Our health experts tell us all the time and give us medical knowledge that we're not trained in, and for God sakes, if we don't listen to them, we're idiots." – Gov. Jim Justice*

Dr. Clay Marsh, the state's COVID-19 czar, said, "The United States and West Virginia are seeing more rapid spread of COVID-19 than we've seen at any other time during this pandemic."

Just testing more is not enough to curb the spread of the virus, he said, and everyone must be committed to wearing masks properly indoors.

Justice said he is trying to protect West Virginians. He said the executive order he issued one week ago to test all employees at nursing homes and assisted living facilities twice each week already has helped by finding asymptomatic cases of COVID-19 in 11 nursing homes or other long-term care facilities.

"This thing can run through a nursing home and kill like nobody's business," Justice said.

Dr. Ayne Amjad, state public health officer, said the tests that revealed those asymptomatic cases were good finds that might have helped more people avoid getting COVID-19.

Secretary Bill Crouch of the Department of Health and Human Resources said 12,000 to 13,000 people work in West Virginia nursing homes and another 5,000 work in assisted living facilities. “That is part of the reason for the increased numbers you see,” he said referring to higher levels of testing displayed on DHHR’s daily COVID-19 online dashboard.

However, he said, much of that testing is point-of-contact antigen testing. State officials are still considering how to report results of such testing, Crouch said, because the results are on cards and are not entered automatically into the electronic reporting system.

In response to a question about how outbreaks associated with churches are handled, Amjad said local health departments are in charge of contact tracing, but state leaders have engaged several faith leaders around West Virginia to encourage many people to get their services online instead of attending them in person. She added that they also are trying to discourage singing in churches.

Another question that came up at today’s briefing was about why schools are being forced to close in some counties when schools generally have not been hotspots for spreading COVID-19 and many people believe students are safer in school than outside of school. Justice responded that it’s just a matter of following the rules established when the state set up the color-coded maps issued daily by DHHR and weekly by the Department of Education.

“Our map is working,” he said. “I know it’s frustrating.”

Justice then accused teachers’ unions of trying to pressure the state and local school boards to close schools.

Asked about how the maps are preventing some schools, particularly those in Berkeley County, from participating in sports playoffs, Justice said he was sympathetic, but the state is doing all it can to help. He already has delayed the winter sports season until January and is just hoping to conclude the fall sports season without further disruption.

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“We’re hanging on by a thread finishing up the fall sports and not just canning the whole deal right now,” Justice said. “Sports have got to take a backseat right now.... I know without question at some point in time we’re going to have to realize that sports don’t mean doodly right now. They don’t. We got to first and foremost get our kids in school, protect our

businesses, protect our economies, protect every bit that we can possibly protect.”

(West Virginia Class AAA quarterfinal football playoff games involving Martinsburg and Spring Mills high schools were postponed today after Berkeley County went red on the state's COVID-19 map. If Berkeley County would drop to orange on Saturday’s map, Martinsburg would host Bridgeport and Spring Mills would travel to Cabell Midland for games starting at 4:00 p.m. Saturday. Also, Musselman High School is hoping to host Spring Valley in a quarterfinal matchup on Sunday at 5:00 p.m. However, both Berkeley County and Wayne County would have to drop from red to orange for that game to be played.)

In response to a question about what will happen in West Virginia as soon as one or more vaccine can be distributed, Justice said he didn’t know because experts don’t even know yet how long any vaccine’s effects will last. “I think we have the data that it’s going to last for months, but beyond that we do not have the data,” he said.

Marsh agreed that authorities don’t yet have answers for all questions about the vaccines, but the priority will be to vaccinate health care workers and first responders. He said getting 70 percent to 75 percent of the population immune to the virus will be necessary to obtain herd immunity.

*“Certainly, this pandemic should be a warning call for us to make sure that we are adapting our public health foundation and also our approach so that we protect ourselves and protect each other.” – Dr. Clay Marsh*

But beyond that, Marsh said, “Certainly, this pandemic should be a warning call for us to make sure that we are adapting our public health foundation and also our approach so that we protect ourselves and protect each other.” He said the same precautions of vaccination, hand-washing and mask-wearing would help with other diseases, such as influenza.

Asked whether he might consider issuing curfews, such as those imposed by governors of Ohio and other states, Justice reiterated that he has no plans to shut anything down, but every option must remain available.

“Today, we do not need to shut anything down, but today, things are getting worse by the minute, and absolutely everything is on the table,” he said.

On other matters, Justice said:

- West Virginia has outbreaks associated with 24 schools for a total of 88 cases.
- The state has 101 outbreaks at long-term care facilities.

- Outbreaks are associated with 22 churches in 17 counties: Berkeley, Cabell, Fayette, Hardy, Jackson, Kanawha, Logan, Marion, Mingo, Monroe, Preston, Raleigh, Taylor, Tyler, Wayne, Wood and Wyoming.
- At the Stevens Correctional Center in McDowell County, almost 40 inmates have recovered while 226 still have active cases. Also, the center has 25 additional staff members (for a total of 33) who have tested positive, while 18 have recovered.
- In the rest of the corrections system throughout the state, 10 inmates and 24 employees have active cases.
- The state has sent more than \$186,170,000 in grants to cities and counties.
- The state now has a map available online (<https://dhhr.wv.gov/COVID-19/pages/testing.aspx>) showing all the free testing sites around the state.

## Rep. Miller Co-sponsors Bill to Help Rural Areas

Congresswoman Carol Miller, R-W.Va., is one of two lead sponsors of a bill designed to bridge America’s economic rural-urban divide as the country attempts to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Congressman David Trone, D-Md., is the other lead sponsor. They call the bill the Building Rural Investments, Development and Growth for the Economy (BRIDGE) Act.

The bill would direct the secretary of the Department of Commerce and the secretary of state to promote the export of goods from rural regions with a focus on small businesses. It also would direct them to facilitate foreign investments into rural communities.

“The BRIDGE Act will work to close the gap between our rural and urban communities, create more jobs, and increase trade,” Miller said in a news release. “America’s rural areas have been hit hard by COVID-19 and deserve the same opportunities as major cities to recover. As more Americans are moving out of big cities, this bill goes a long way in ensuring our small towns remain wonderful places to live, work, and raise a family.”

Trone, who represents western Maryland, said, “We need to do everything we can to expand the markets for these American-made products. This bill takes a major step towards bridging the economic divide in our country and ensuring that all Americans can prosper, no matter where they live.”



*West Virginia Update is produced by TSG Consulting, a public relations and governmental affairs firm based in Charleston. For more information about TSG Consulting’s services, call 304-345-1161.*