

Contact: MaryWade Burnside
Public Information Officer
Monongalia County Health Department
Morgantown, WV 26505
(304) 598-5152 | www.monchd.org
MaryWade.Burnside@wv.gov



For Immediate Release

Testing & vaccines up in Monongalia County as Delta variant cases rise

MORGANTOWN, WV (Aug. 10, 2021) — COVID-19 testing conducted by Monongalia County Health Department and West Virginia University more than doubled Friday compared to the week before, rising from 105 on July 30 to 286 on Aug. 6.

At the same time, MCHD Clinical Services reports that individuals seeking COVID-19 vaccines has been steadily rising to about 10 per day, after reporting the previous figure of four to 10 vaccines per day during the last week in July.

Still, noted Dr. Lee B. Smith, MCHD executive director and county health officer, individuals need to do more now in order to turn the situation around as the more contagious and infectious Delta variant of COVID-19 continues to rise.

“People have let their guard down,” Dr. Smith said. “They go on vacation and as soon as they get off the plane, they put their mask away. The vast majority cases are of the Delta variant. We know it’s more infectious and can cause more serious illness, particularly in those that are not vaccinated.”

However, breakthrough cases in vaccinated individuals are also emerging, although the vaccine generally provides protection against severe symptoms and hospitalizations in those cases.

“It is my hope that more of those people who have said they want to wait and see about the vaccine have reached that point, because now it’s clear that those who are unvaccinated are at the highest risk of infection,” Dr. Smith said. “I understand that people are fatigued by COVID and they want to blame someone, but it continues to be spread by people who are not vaccinated and not acting in good conscience.”

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453 Van Voorhis Road
Morgantown, WV 265051

Some larger cities in the United States have reinstated mask mandates as cases go up and as COVID units in hospitals fill up. West Virginia Gov. Jim Justice rescinded the state's mask mandate for all individuals on June 20.

“But if I were not vaccinated, I would wear a mask out of consideration for those who can't be vaccinated,” Dr. Smith said. “I still don't understand that people agree to ‘No shirt, no shoes, no service,’ but if you ask them to wear a mask, they want to have a fistfight.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)) updated mask guidance on July 27, recommending that all unvaccinated individuals wear masks in public indoor settings, as well as vaccinated individuals in areas of high or substantial transmission.

The fact that COVID testing has risen dramatically and vaccines slightly are good signs but vaccine numbers still need to increase. After garnering national media attention for its successful vaccine rollout earlier in the year, West Virginia's rate of fully vaccinated individuals was 49.5% out of the entire population of nearly 1.8 million, as of Monday.

That's slightly lower than the percentage of fully vaccinated Americans, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which puts that figure at 49.9% as of Thursday, Aug. 5. Some states have higher vaccination rates and others have lower rates, which has prompted an uptick in COVID cases that in some areas have caused hospital crowding similar to the beginning of the pandemic.

“Most U.S. states and jurisdictions are experiencing substantial or high levels of community transmission fueled by the spread of the highly contagious ... Delta variant,” according to the CDC's online COVID Data Tracker. “COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths continue to increase, especially in communities with lower vaccination coverage.”

The rate in the United States of individuals with at least one dose recently reached 70%, which was the minimal goal to reach herd immunity. But, especially with the Delta variant spreading, health officials emphasize that this number needs to rise.

Monongalia County Health Department has set up vaccine clinics in community settings in addition to those given by appointment at MCHD Clinical Services. For instance, MCHD employees will be at La Tapatia Food Market and Tacos on Green Bag Road from 3 to 6 p.m. Saturday to provide COVID-19 vaccines to employees as well as members of the public who are 12 or older.

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“If an organization believes that they have at least five or 10 people who would like a vaccine, we can come to them,” said Jennifer Goldcamp, RN, program manager of MCHD Clinical Services.

For individuals who plan to travel, CDC offers guidance for hotspots of all kinds at [cdc.gov/travel](https://www.cdc.gov/travel). Travelers should research COVID testing requirements for their destination and their return trip before they confirm plans.

“It’s also a good idea to find out what the COVID rates are for the area you plan to visit and to make commonsense choices about safety measures based on your activities,” Dr. Smith said.

PCR testing conducted by MCHD and WVU is held from 9 a.m. to noon Mondays and Fridays at the WVU Rec Center. And, as of Aug. 11, Wednesday has been added to the schedule, from noon to 3 p.m. Results are back within 24 hours on Monday and Friday and by Thursday evening for Wednesday testing.

After seeing testing numbers dwindle to under 100 some weeks, it’s been steadily rising and reached about 450 last week, with around 160 done on Aug. 2, 286 on Aug. 6 and 190 on Monday. Fridays tend to be busier.

“We will increase our testing capacity as needed,” said Joe Klass, MCHD Threat Preparedness specialist.

Also, Monongalia County officially has 17 positive COVID cases that have been sequenced and found to have the Delta variant. However, because not all positive cases are sequenced, and because there has been about a monthlong turnaround time to get these results back, this is not necessarily an accurate figure.

“That will be changing as sequencing capacity continues to increase,” said Dr. Diane K. Gross, MCHD’s regional epidemiologist.

The DHHR will be posting additional information to its COVID variant dashboard this week, she added.

As in the rest of the United States, COVID cases have been rising in West Virginia. The state Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR) has been updating COVID cases on its dashboard on weekdays. Last Monday, the three-day rise in West Virginia cases was 665. This past Monday, that total was 1,037.

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“We are once again in the Harvard University COVID metric orange zone, with more than 10.5 people infected for every 100,000 population,” Dr. Smith said. “This pattern was seen last year when returning travelers and vacationers came back to Monongalia County with COVID infections.”

Monongalia County was in the green zone, with fewer than 1 case per 100,000, during late spring and early summer before climbing back into the yellow and then orange zones in the past month.

“And now our rate of infection is increasing daily,” Dr. Smith said.

In addition to wearing masks in certain situations, Dr. Smith urges individuals to wash their hands frequently, avoid crowds and maintain their social distance from others in order to avoid going back into the red zone.

“We’re headed in the wrong direction,” he added. “It gives us concern that people are on vacation and that people aren’t always using caution. I would ask people to show a little bit of respect for their neighbors.”

To make an appointment for a COVID-19 vaccine or to set up a vaccine event at a business or organization, call MCHD Clinical Services at 304-598-5119.

For up-to-date information on health and wellness in Monongalia County, check out monchd.org and follow the health department on Facebook and Twitter @WVMCHD and on Instagram at #wvmchd.