

The News&Observer

COVID vaccine live updates: Here's what to know in North Carolina on Aug. 25

At least **1,172,571** people in North Carolina have tested positive for the coronavirus, and at least **14,212** have died since March 2020, according to state health officials.

The N.C. Department of Health and Human Services on Wednesday **reported 6,130 new COVID-19 cases**, up from 4,623 on Tuesday.

Sixty coronavirus-related deaths were added on Wednesday. The state health department doesn't specify the dates on which the newly reported deaths occurred.

At least **3,503 people were hospitalized with COVID-19** as of Wednesday, up from 3,342 the day before.

Triangle schools report COVID cluster

At least 13 schools in the Triangle have active COVID-19 clusters as the school year begins.

A report from the Department of Health and Human Services show 10 schools in Wake County, two in Durham County and one in Johnson County have active clusters, The News & Observer reported.

Those numbers are expected to continue to climb as large numbers of students return to in-person learning for the first time since before the pandemic started.

In the past six weeks, 18- to 24-year-olds have been infected at rates higher than any other age group, and children 17 or younger are seeing a surge in cases not seen since the virus' winter peak.

The rising cases and low vaccination rates are leading to more severe cases of COVID-19, too. More younger people are being hospitalized, compared to earlier in the pandemic, though 50- to 59-year-olds make up 20% of all those hospitalized since June 21 — more than any other age group.

The climbing cases and hospitalization rates, driven largely by the highly infectious COVID-19 delta variant, signal that the pandemic is far from over. With a mostly in-person school year fast approaching, young people who don't get vaccinated or are ineligible to do so are at risk of catching, and spreading, the virus, experts say.

Experts say the current infection and hospitalization rates are likely much higher than what's being reported and predict the current case and hospitalization rates will only grow once school starts.

NC vaccination rates by county

As the COVID-19 delta variant continues to spread in North Carolina, vaccination rates across the state's 100 counties vary significantly — **from as low as 34% to as high as 80%**. Every county in the state, except for Hyde County, is displaying '**high levels of community spread**'.

Craven County numbers: **58.3%** of the population age 18 and above are fully vaccinated and **46.5%** of the total population is fully vaccinated.

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services has warned that people who are not vaccinated are at greater risk of contracting the virus, and of developing a serious illness as a result of it. Last month, **DHHS reported more than 94% of recent cases in the state were among those who were not fully vaccinated.**

Despite growing concerns over breakthrough cases, when someone contracts COVID-19 despite being vaccinated, vaccines have remained safe and effective, according to health officials.

As of Aug. 16, **roughly 0.004%** of the **168 million fully vaccinated** people in the U.S. had reported a **hospitalization** due to a breakthrough case of the virus, the CDC reported. Roughly **0.001%** of those fully vaccinated had reported **deaths**.

And on Monday, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration granted full approval to the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine, which had previously been authorized for emergency use. Only the Pfizer vaccine remains available to those 12 and older.

The news comes just days after N.C. health officials said people who have not been vaccinated are **four times more** likely to contract COVID-19 than those who are vaccinated, The News & Observer reported.

"This not where we want to be, but we have a sure way out: vaccines," Gov. Roy Cooper said at a Wednesday press briefing.

FDA grants full approval to Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine

Maia Anderson - Monday, August 23rd, 2021

The FDA **granted full approval to Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine Aug. 23** for use in people ages **16 and older**, and said it will now be marketed as Comirnaty.

The shot is still available under emergency use authorization for people ages 12 and up.

"While this and other vaccines have met the FDA's rigorous, scientific standards for emergency use authorization, as the first FDA-approved COVID-19 vaccine, the public can be very confident that this vaccine meets the high standards for safety, effectiveness, and manufacturing quality the FDA requires of an approved product," acting FDA Commissioner Janet Woodcock, MD, said in a news release.

The FDA's decision is based on effectiveness data from about 20,000 vaccine and 20,000 placebo recipients ages 16 and older. The safety of the shot was evaluated in about 22,000 vaccine recipients and 22,000 placebo recipients.

The agency found that the shot was **91 percent effective at preventing COVID-19 and potentially serious outcomes, including hospitalization and death.**

About 12,000 vaccine recipients have been monitored for at least 6 months following their second dose. The most commonly reported side effects observed were pain, redness and swelling at the injection site, fatigue, headache, muscle or joint pain, chills and fever.

"Our scientific and medical experts conducted an incredibly thorough and thoughtful evaluation of this vaccine. We evaluated scientific data and information included in hundreds of thousands of pages, conducted our own analyses of Comirnaty's safety and effectiveness, and performed a detailed assessment of the manufacturing processes, including inspections of the manufacturing facilities," Peter Marks, MD, PhD, director of FDA's Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research, said in the news release.

The FDA also said it conducted a rigorous evaluation of the risk of [myocarditis and pericarditis](#) — two rare conditions that involve inflammation of the heart — following vaccination with Pfizer's shot. Both conditions see less than 200,000 cases per year in the U.S. and have been [seen in a small fraction](#) of COVID-19 shot recipients.

The agency found the shot does cause an increased risk of both, particularly within seven days following the second dose, but didn't specify how much the risk is increased.

The risk is higher in males under age 40 compared to females and older males, and is highest in males ages 12 through 17. Most people's symptoms are resolved, though some have required intensive support, the agency said. The shot's prescribing information includes a warning about the risks.

The FDA is requiring Pfizer to conduct postmarket studies to further assess the risks of myocarditis and pericarditis following vaccination. Though not required by the FDA, Pfizer has also said it will conduct postmarket studies on the shot's outcomes in pregnant people.

Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine, developed in partnership with BioNTech, has been available under emergency use authorization for people ages 16 and up since Dec. 11 and for people ages 12 and up since May 10.

"We have not lost sight that the COVID-19 public health crisis continues in the U.S. and that the public is counting on safe and effective vaccines. The public and medical community can be confident that although we approved this vaccine expeditiously, it was fully in keeping with our existing high standards for vaccines in the U.S.," Dr. Marks said.

The American Medical Association, American Hospital Association and American Nurses Association released a joint statement applauding the FDA's decision to fully approve the vaccine, calling it a **"major step forward in the worldwide effort to end this pandemic."**

"According to recent polling, 30 percent of unvaccinated people said they were waiting for vaccines to receive full approval before getting vaccinated. We are there now; this vaccine is fully approved. If uncertainty was holding you back, now is the time to act. And if you still have

questions about the vaccines or about COVID-19, please consult your healthcare professional," the organizations urged. "Science, data, and thorough research have given us the tools to defeat COVID-19. With the delta variant surging, there has never been a better time to get vaccinated."

Kentucky sets 3 new COVID-19 records; National Guard teams to deploy to struggling hospitals

Kelly Gooch - Tuesday, August 24th, 2021

Kentucky will send National Guard members to struggling hospitals as the state set new pandemic records Aug. 23 for residents with COVID-19 who are hospitalized, admitted to the intensive care unit and on ventilators, Gov. Andy Beshear [said](#) during a press conference.

The governor reported a record 1,893 Kentuckians hospitalized for COVID-19 Aug. 23. The state also reported records for Kentuckians in ICUs (529) and on ventilators (301).

"Our hospitalizations have been doubling just about every two weeks. That means we are **getting really close to every single bed across the entire Commonwealth that we can staff being full**. There are some hospitals in some areas that are already at critical, out of space and now spend more time calling other places to see if there's a bed than they ever thought possible," said Mr. Beshear.

Overall, the state estimated Aug. 23 that between 21 and 25 of Kentucky hospitals were grappling with critical staffing shortages.

Amid the COVID-19 surge, National Guard members will deploy to struggling hospitals, beginning in September, Mr. Beshear announced.

He said the initial deployment will be 75 members, in teams of 15.

The governor also announced that he has requested eight teams that include registered nurses and nursing assistants from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, to assist hospitals amid staffing shortages. He said he also requested emergency medical services strike teams to help with patient transfers.

Federal team sent to Alabama hospital overwhelmed by COVID-19 patients

Gabrielle Masson - Monday, August 23rd, 2021

Fourteen HHS healthcare professionals arrived Aug. 20 at Foley, Ala.-based South Baldwin Regional Medical Center to help amid a COVID-19 surge, reports [Alabama Live](#).

The hospital's intensive care unit was at **190 percent capacity** as of Aug. 12, Scott Harris, MD, state health officer for Alabama, said during an Aug. 20 COVID-19 briefing.

"Because our hospitals have been under such strain, we've been working on a number of plans to try to bring additional staff using federal resources," Dr. Harris said.

Dr. Harris said he hopes a second federal team will come to the state soon. He also mentioned the rising infection numbers among children. From Aug. 1 to Aug. 12, **Alabama had 6,181 confirmed virus cases among residents 5-17 years**, up from 1,356 during the same time period last year, according to data from the Alabama Department of Public Health.

Efficacy of COVID-19 shots in front-line workers tumbled with delta's spread in CDC study

Maia Anderson - Wednesday, August 25th, 2021

Overall effectiveness of the three COVID-19 vaccines used in the U.S. **fell from 91 percent to 66 percent** in front-line workers after the delta variant became the dominant form of the virus, according to a [study published Aug. 24 by the CDC](#). But, the researchers noted, it's unclear if the drop is due to the delta variant or if the vaccine's efficacy wanes over time.

The study included **4,217** front-line workers, including first responders, healthcare workers and others who could not work remotely, 83 percent of whom were vaccinated. Sixty-five percent were vaccinated with Pfizer's shot; 33 percent with Moderna's; and 2 percent with Johnson & Johnson's. Study participants were located in Arizona, Florida, Oregon, Texas, Utah and Minnesota.

In the months before the delta variant became the dominant form of the virus, the shots were overall 91 percent effective at preventing infection in the study participants. After the variant became dominant, that number fell to 66 percent. Overall, the vaccines reduced infections by 80 percent between Dec. 14 and Aug. 14 compared to unvaccinated workers. Researchers adjusted the results for factors such as occupation, demographic characteristics, frequency of close social interactions and mask use.

Ashley Fowlkes, an epidemiologist on the COVID-19 response team at the CDC, told [The New York Times](#) that "66 percent effectiveness is a really high number. It's not 91 percent, but it is still a two-thirds reduction in the risk of infection among vaccinated participants."

She added that the drop in effectiveness "should be interpreted with caution" because the period of time in which delta was the dominant form of the virus during the study was short, and the overall number of infections was small.

Unvaccinated people 29 times more likely to be hospitalized for COVID-19, CDC suggests

Mackenzie Bean - Tuesday, August 24th, 2021

Unvaccinated people in Los Angeles County, Calif., were about **29 times** more likely to be hospitalized for COVID-19 compared to fully vaccinated residents this spring and summer, according to the CDC's Aug. 24 Morbidity and Mortality Weekly [report](#).

CDC researchers analyzed data on more than **43,127** COVID-19 infections that occurred among county residents 16 and older between May 1 and July 25.

Fully vaccinated and partially vaccinated people accounted for 25.3 percent and 3.3 percent of cases, respectively. The remaining **71.4 percent of infections occurred in unvaccinated people**.

As of July 25, unvaccinated people were 4.9 times more likely to get infected with COVID-19 and 29.2 times more likely to be hospitalized, according to the CDC. **Fully vaccinated adults were also less likely to require intensive care or mechanical ventilation, or die from the virus compared to unvaccinated or partially vaccinated people.**

"These infection and hospitalization rate data indicate that **authorized vaccines** were **protective** against SARS-CoV-2 infection and severe COVID-19 during a period when transmission of the delta variant was increasing," the CDC said.