

# Contact tracers 'overwhelmed' as COVID-19 continues to surge in Kentucky

By [Alex Acquisto](#) November 09, 2020 04:51 PM,

Updated November 09, 2020 05:38 PM



COVID-19 contract tracing at UK's Boone Center

The University of Kentucky's Boone Hall has been converted into an on campus COVID-19 contact tracing center which has been working with the UK student population since late July. By [Alex Slitz](#)

Gov. Andy Beshear announced 1,745 new cases of COVID-19 in Kentucky on Monday, continuing the state's "significant surge," and lifting the case total to 122,567.

Monday's case total is the highest ever amount reported on a Monday, Beshear said. He also announced 11 additional deaths, raising the death toll to 1,576.

"What this ought to tell you is there's no way to deny or rationalize it," he said. "If you're not wearing a mask, we can't stop the surge and we

can't protect ourselves. If you don't believe that, open your eyes, open your ears, open your heart."

The positivity rate, a seven-day rolling average of positive tests, is up to 7.49 percent — the highest it's been since May 5, two months before masks were mandated in Kentucky.

Community spread is so severe right now across the state, contact tracers cannot keep up with the number of positive cases, Dr. Steven Stack, Kentucky's public health commissioner said. Contact tracing is a mitigation tactic deployed when a person tests positive. Tracers aim to contact each person exposed to the positive individual to urge them to quarantine for 14 days, to avoid potential further spread.

"Contact tracing, unfortunately, is overwhelmed," Stack said of the more than 1,000 working tracers across Kentucky. But "when you have 12,000-plus cases in a week, there is no way the system can keep up."

Kentucky continues to consistently shatter past coronavirus metrics; the number of hospitalizations caused by the virus, for instance, continue to reach new heights. On Monday, there were 1,133 people with COVID-19 hospitalized, 300 in intensive care — a record and up from 279 on Sunday — and 142 people on ventilators, six more than yesterday.

Spiking hospitalizations is "directly related to our effort, or lack of effort, to stop [spread of the virus]," Beshear said.

There are 81 "red zone" counties statewide, including Fayette, Jessamine and Bourbon counties. Beshear has asked all red counties to [concertedly restrict in-person behavior](#) to slow spread in their areas. He said he hopes to have data next week showing whether

communities who've heeded that guidance have blunted new case numbers.

Those recommendations include temporarily stopping in-person visitation in nursing homes, where residents and staff continue to suffer from outbreaks. There are 56 new cases among nursing home residents and 59 new cases among staff, Beshear said.

At the Thomson-Hood Veterans Center in Wilmore, where an outbreak was first detected in early October, a total of 59 staff and 85 residents have tested positive. All but 10 staff have so far recovered, Beshear said. Twenty-two veterans who were infected have died, he said, 40 have recovered, 23 are still actively infected.

Week over week for the last month, Kentucky has set seven-day new case records. [Last week was no different](#), when the state ended the first week of November with 12,421 new cases of the virus, nearly 500 more than the last record week in late October.

[Lexington broke its previous single-day record for new cases](#) on Saturday when it reported 236 (the previous record was 181). Fayette County also set another record last week for exceeding 1,000 new cases in a seven-day period. Community spread is rampant county wide, local health officials have said, but cases are also rising again at the University of Kentucky, where 43 new cases were confirmed over the weekend.

Beshear called the news earlier on Monday that a COVID-19 vaccine from pharmaceutical giant Pfizer has proven more than 90 percent effective in its Phase 3 trial a "potential light at the end of the tunnel." But widespread community distribution of it still wouldn't be timely.

"The bad news is the reality of the moment," he said, which is that the virus "is spreading significantly," he said.

And with the holidays approaching, Beshear and Dr. Stack cautioned against the dangers of traditional family and friend gatherings.

"Our traditional holiday gatherings are a recipe for disaster," Stack said. Those activities would "super charge this pandemic."



Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear speaks during a media conference providing an update on the COVID-19 pandemic in Kentucky at the state Capitol in Frankfort, Ky., Thursday, Oct. 29, 2020. Ryan C. Hermens [rhermens@herald-leader.com](mailto:rhermens@herald-leader.com)