



**OFFICE OF GOVERNOR ANDY BESHEAR**  
**COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Contact: Crystal Staley**  
**502-545-3714**  
[Crystal.Staley@ky.gov](mailto:Crystal.Staley@ky.gov)

**Sebastian Kitchen**  
**502-330-0799**  
[Sebastian.Kitchen@ky.gov](mailto:Sebastian.Kitchen@ky.gov)

**Gov. Beshear to Kentuckians: This Week, Celebrate Health  
Care Heroes**

*Gov. Beshear also announces record numbers of Kentuckians with COVID-19 who are hospitalized, admitted to the ICU and on ventilators*

**FRANKFORT, Ky. (Aug. 23, 2021)** – Today, Gov. Andy Beshear visited health care heroes at the Franklin County Health Department and signed a proclamation to recognize the start of Health Care Heroes Appreciation Week in the commonwealth.

He encouraged businesses, schools, communities, churches, families and more to celebrate the health care heroes around them as well.

“Despite the challenges, our health care heroes are doing what they always do: Providing the best, most compassionate care possible to Kentuckians in need,” said **Gov. Beshear**. “But they need our help now, and the work they’ve been doing for us all deserves to be respected and supported in every way we can.”

Today, Gov. Beshear also announced record numbers of Kentuckians with COVID-19 who are hospitalized, admitted to the ICU and on ventilators, and health care leaders shared what they are experiencing in their hospitals.

“For our inpatient census of COVID patients, we have doubled in one week. And our curve appears to be getting sharper,” said **Dr. William Melahn, chief medical officer at St. Claire HealthCare**. “We’ve made the very difficult decision to move to code yellow, which is our disaster plan. There’s two reasons to be vaccinated. One is to protect you, and the other is to protect people around you. Let me just point out a little bit of reality: If we had another disaster happen right now – even a small one – we don’t have any reserve left. So if we had a bus accident, an influenza outbreak or anything else, I’m not sure what we would do.”

“It’s a nightmare to try to staff these surge units, and it’s not just COVID patients that we have at the hospital right now. It’s a lot of other critically ill patients. So when you throw COVID patients on top of that, it makes it doubly hard to staff,” said **Lerae Wilson, vice president of patient service and chief nursing officer at St. Claire HealthCare**.

“We are going to overcome this, but it is going to take a monumental effort. It doesn’t matter how many nurses, therapists, physicians, pharmacists or anything else we have, it is not going to be enough for this surge,” said **Steve Haines, RN, BSN, RRT and nursing director of critical care services at Ephraim McDowell Regional Medical Center**. “Right now, this looks like there is no end. The only chance we have is vaccination.”

“In the past three weeks, we have seen the number of COVID-19 patients in our health care organization quadruple. We are seeing younger patients that are sicker. They are filling up our hospital beds, backing up patients in the emergency department, and we are getting to the point where it is going to be hard to deliver emergency care to those who need it,” said **Dr. Jason Smith, M.D., chief medical officer of UofL Health**. “I urge everyone in Louisville and the commonwealth, please, step up and get the vaccine for yourself, your families and the communities around you.”

“Like the Governor, I agree there is one thing we can’t do enough of during these times, and that is to thank our caregivers for all they are doing for the men, women and children in our communities,” said **Mike Yungmann, senior vice president,**

**Mercy Health, and market president, Paducah and Irvine.** “I’m in awe daily of the truly heroic work of our nurses, doctors and care teams to care not just for patients, but for each other, especially as we see the number of COVID-19 cases rise again.”

### **COVID-19 Case Information Update**

Number of people who have received at least one vaccine dose in Kentucky: **2,476,420**

**New Cases Today:** 2,596

**Positivity Rate:** 12.87%

**Current Hospitalizations:** 1,893

**Current Intensive Care Admittances:** 529

**Currently on Ventilators:** 301

### **Governor Announces New Red Zone County Recommendations**

Today, Gov. Beshear announced new recommendations for 119 counties in the “red zone” for COVID-19 cases, meaning a county has a weekly average of 25 or more new COVID-19 cases per day, per 100,000 people.

The Governor’s new red zone recommendations include:

- Increase vaccination efforts to reach unvaccinated persons;
- Require masking in government buildings;
- Encourage masking in public indoor settings for all persons  $\geq 2$  years of age;
- Encourage masking in crowded outdoor settings for all persons  $\geq 2$  years of age;
- Encourage physical distancing of at least six feet apart in public settings;
- Maximize usage of outdoor spaces for gatherings;
- Consider limiting in-person community gatherings and postponing large events;
- Encourage medically vulnerable persons to avoid large crowds; and
- Engage community partners and stakeholders to implement a strong communication plan.

### **Gov. Beshear Requests FEMA Support for Understaffed Hospitals**

Gov. Beshear said in other COVID-19 surges, Kentucky’s hospitals, emergency medical services (EMS) and health care systems were able to adapt and expand to take care of patients. However, with the surge from the delta variant, some of the state’s systems are in severe distress and facing collapse.

In addition to record numbers of patients, the available pool of licensed health care providers has decreased due to attrition and extreme demand across the country.

For those reasons, Gov. Beshear said he is submitting a resource request to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for additional health care professionals to help where Kentucky needs them most.

“We’ve requested eight teams that include eight registered nurses and two certified nursing assistants per team. We’ve also requested two EMS strike teams, which include personnel and trucks,” said **Gov. Beshear**. “Our hospitals need this support, and we will do what it takes to make it happen. Until then, we need everyone to wear a mask indoors and get vaccinated. We hope FEMA will approve this request quickly.”

If federal approval is received, medical teams will support:

- St. Claire Regional Medical Center;
- Pikeville Medical Center;
- Saint Joseph London;
- The Medical Center at Bowling Green; and
- Baptist Health Hardin.

### **Kentucky National Guard COVID-19 Mission Extended**

Gov. Beshear said on Aug. 18, President Joe Biden extended reimbursement to states for mobilizing National Guard personnel in support of COVID-19 response efforts beyond the original deadline of Sept. 30, through the end of the calendar year.

“In Kentucky, this means we’ll have our Kentucky Guardsmen continuing to help combat the surge we’re seeing due to the delta variant,” said **Gov. Beshear**. “Our Kentucky Guardsmen have been on mission since March 2020 to help our commonwealth combat COVID-19, and we’re appreciative of their continued support.”

The Kentucky National Guard will provide logistical and administrative support to local hospitals beginning Sept. 1. There will be a dedicated National Guard central command for this mission and deployments will be in two-week increments. The initial deployment will include 75 Guardsmen, in five teams of 15 people.

Starting locations are:

- The Medical Center at Bowling Green;
- St. Claire Regional Medical Center, Morehead; and
- Pikeville Medical Center.

Other Kentucky National Guard fall missions include:

- Mobile Vaccination Teams (local schools, universities, detention centers, among others);
- Supporting local health departments; and
- Food bank support.

### ***Shot at a Million***

The Governor continued to encourage all Kentuckians 12 and older to get a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine and then sign up for a chance to win \$1 million or a full college scholarship at [ShotAtAMillion.ky.gov](https://ShotAtAMillion.ky.gov). Two \$1 million winners and 10 full-scholarship winners were announced on [July 2](#) and [July 30](#). On Aug. 27, another \$1 million winner and five more full-scholarship winners will be announced.

“Our last Shot at a Million drawing is this Thursday. We’ve had almost 100,000 new entries since our last drawing and I hope even more people will get vaccinated and sign up in the next two days,” said **Gov. Beshear**.

More than 850,000 Kentuckians 18 and over have entered to win a million dollars and nearly 50,000 youth ages 12 to 17 have entered for their chance to receive a full scholarship to a Kentucky public college, university, trade or technical school.

###