



## OFFICE OF GOVERNOR ANDY BESHEAR

COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Gov. Beshear: Unvaccinated Kentuckians Face Greatest Risk Since Pandemic Began**

*Governor highlights how vaccines will save lives, keep schools open, protect economy*

**FRANKFORT, Ky. (Aug. 12, 2021)** – On Thursday during his weekly Team Kentucky update, Gov. Andy Beshear said Kentucky’s economic momentum continues to build as more Kentuckians get vaccinated, fighting the commonwealth’s fastest ever surge of COVID-19 cases.

“The delta variant is the most aggressive, and it looks like it may be the most deadly, form of COVID that we have faced,” said **Gov. Beshear**. “If you are unvaccinated, you are at the very greatest risk that you have been at since the start of the pandemic. COVID has been the third leading cause of death in the United States over the past year and a half. Right now, it’s putting more pressure than it ever has before on our health care heroes.”

The Governor highlighted a recent warning that Mississippi’s hospital system [could fail in 10 days](#) because of an exponential rise in COVID-19 cases among unvaccinated residents.

On Aug. 10, Arkansas officials reported there were only [eight empty ICU beds](#) in the entire state.

Health care leaders from across Kentucky emphasized the risks of not getting vaccinated for COVID-19.

“Right now, in our hospitals, nurses across the commonwealth are leaving their families to take care of yours,” said **Cindy Lucchese, MBA, BSN, RN, chief nurse executive for UofL Physicians at UofL Health in Louisville**. “Many think only the elderly and those with underlying health conditions will experience complications from this virus. Well, that’s just not the case. With the emergence of the delta variant, we are seeing younger and healthier people become very sick, and this includes pediatric patients. Some are children under 12, who currently cannot be protected by a vaccine.”

“One of the most important things we have seen with this round of COVID is that the age of admission has significantly decreased. The average age of admission has dropped from 75 to 55, and we have noticed the same with our mortalities,” said **Stacy Caudill, M.D., hospitalist and chief medical officer of King’s Daughters Medical Center in Ashland**. “Of our current admissions in the hospital, 94% are unvaccinated and 100% of our ICU patients are unvaccinated.”

“We are seeing the most rapid rise of cases that I have seen since the pandemic started,” said **William Melahn, chief medical officer of St. Claire Health Care in Morehead**. “We are worn out, but we are not going to give up. If you really want to help us, go get vaccinated. Vaccinations are extraordinarily safe. We have not seen anyone in our hospital with vaccine complications, but we have seen too many patients with COVID that have not been vaccinated.”

“Our veterans have served in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, have served our country – that’s just who they are and what they do. Most of them were asking, ‘When can I get a vaccine?’ They looked at it as simply another way for them to continue to serve and to be of service,” said **Martha Workman, deputy executive director of the Office of Kentucky Veterans Centers**. “Our staff stepped up, and they also have been getting vaccinated. I’m happy to tell you today, across our veterans centers, our veterans are at a 94.5% vaccination rate. Our staff is at 71.5%, and I’m also happy to report that this week alone we had 18 additional staff step up and get their first vaccinations, plus we’ve had two more veterans who’ve done that. Our veterans deserve to be safe in our facilities.”

Two staff members from Thomson-Hood Veterans Center, where 34 residents died of COVID-19 last year during the state’s fall and winter surge in cases,

honored those “loved and lost” and said vaccines can prevent Kentuckians from experiencing the painful losses their team did.

“We had our first COVID preparedness meeting Feb. 23, 2020, before just about anyone else in the United States,” said **Joni Gosser, administrator of Thomson-Hood Veterans Center**. “Our staff bravely held the line, and we went months without having one case of COVID. But last fall when the community started to see a surge, COVID finally breached our facility.”

“We’ve finally got our shot. We have a weapon we didn’t have last year, that we prayed for last year, that we dreamed of,” said **Caity Grose, nurse executive at Thomson-Hood Veterans Center**, after sharing a story about one patient she lost to the virus. “The death and the pain is preventable. The school closures, the business closures, the nursing home shutdowns, all of it is preventable this time. We’ve been nurses for a long time. This is not political. It’s about humanity. We do not have to needlessly suffer through a round two of this.”

### **COVID-19 Update**

From March 1 to Aug. 11, 2021, 89.8% of COVID-19 cases, 90.5% of COVID-19 hospitalizations and 88.5% of COVID-19 deaths were among partially vaccinated or unvaccinated Kentuckians.

As of today, 2,386,200 Kentuckians have received at least their first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine; 5,589 have been vaccinated over the past day.

The Governor encouraged 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.

**Tourism, Arts and Heritage Cabinet Launches ‘Vax & Visit KY’ Initiative**  
Gov. Beshear and **Tourism, Arts and Heritage Cabinet Secretary Mike Berry** announced the [Vax & Visit KY initiative](#), the commonwealth’s latest effort to encourage Kentuckians to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. Kentucky will offer in-state travel incentives at Kentucky State Parks for Kentuckians who have received the COVID-19 vaccination.

“The tourism industry remains committed to being a partner in the commonwealth’s efforts to sprint out of this pandemic,” said Secretary Berry. “Offering vaccine incentives to Kentucky State Parks will not only boost travel

revenue in local communities, but also ensure that Kentucky continues to be seen as a safe travel destination post pandemic.”

Beginning today, eligible Kentuckians who have received their shot of hope can register for a chance to win a safe-cation at any of Kentucky’s 45 state parks. Safe-cations include golf, lodging and campground gift certificates. Kentuckians must be 18 years old or older to enter and have received at least their first dose of a Moderna or Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine, or the one-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

Winners will be selected beginning **Thursday, Sept. 9**. The final drawing will take place on **Thursday, Oct. 7, 2021**. To learn more, visit [tah.ky.gov](http://tah.ky.gov).

### **Gov. Beshear: Fighting COVID-19 Will Also Protect Economic Progress**

The Governor said his three top priorities in fighting COVID-19 are saving lives and protecting health; ensuring as much in-person learning for students as possible; and protecting Kentucky’s continued economic resurgence. He highlighted two of the most recent examples of the state’s growing economic momentum.

In congratulating Amazon this week on beginning operations at its 2,000-job air cargo hub at the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport, Gov. Beshear said the \$1.5 billion facility cements Kentucky’s role as a top U.S. location for distribution and logistics, a major industry moving the commonwealth’s economy forward. To learn more, see the [full release](#).

This week, Gov. Beshear congratulated Lexington-based Quality Logistics LLC, doing business as Longship, on opening its new office in Fayette County, a \$4.3 million investment creating 155 well-paying jobs for Kentucky residents. To learn more, see the [full release](#).

### **Team Kentucky All-Stars**

Today, Gov. Beshear recognized education leaders who chose to require masks in schools this fall to protect students, staff and their communities even before the Governor signed an [executive order](#) requiring universal masking in schools and child care.

“Masks work to keep our children safe and our schools open. That’s a fact,” said **Gov. Beshear**. “This is a united front of saving lives, keeping our kids in school and continuing our economic momentum. I want to thank the school system in Dawson Springs, my dad’s hometown, for being one of the first districts to require masks in schools this fall, a full week before the statewide executive

order was signed. That took guts, but you did it because you knew it would protect our kids and communities.”

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