

The West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR) has developed a fact sheet regarding the COVID-19 case numbers it shares with the public.

DHHR is the official reporting agency for COVID-19, and in turn provides official case numbers to the CDC. Medical providers and laboratories are required to report test results to their local health departments, which provide them to DHHR. Commercial/private labs are also required to report test results to DHHR. However, the reporting of negative and pending tests to DHHR has been inconsistent, thus causing a delay in official reporting.

Q: What must be reported to DHHR?

A: COVID-19 is a new disease and therefore, newly reportable to West Virginia's public health system. Medical providers and laboratories are required to report test results to their local health departments, which provide them to DHHR. Commercial (private) labs are also required to report test results to DHHR.

Q: What COVID-19 data is DHHR releasing?

A: The figures on coronavirus.wv.gov show the number of:

- All officially reported positive results and probable cases in West Virginia
- All official deaths
- Cumulative percentage of positive test results by date
- Daily percentage of positive test results

The online dashboard also presents the number of positive tests by county, age group and gender, and the number of laboratory results by age group and date.

DHHR issues press releases daily with these figures as well as the number of positive results and probable cases reported that day.

Additional data such as trends (i.e., recovered and active cases, hospitalizations) is also available.

Q: How frequently is DHHR updating these COVID-19 numbers?

A: DHHR is updating figures **twice each day, at 10 a.m. and 5 p.m.**

Q: Are these figures truly totals for all of West Virginia?

A: For positive and probable cases, **yes**. Because of the reporting requirements, **the official "Total Positive Cases" figure is the most reliable available statewide for West Virginia.**

Q: What details is DHHR providing about each case?

A: DHHR is currently providing a breakdown of probable cases and positive tests by county, age group and gender, and of total laboratory results by age group and date.

Q: Why isn't DHHR providing more details about each positive case?

A: DHHR faces limitations arising from the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). For example, disclosing cases by city or town is not anticipated at this time to protect the privacy and dignity of all West Virginians in accordance with HIPAA.

For more information about HIPAA and its protections: <https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-individuals/index.html>.

Q: Why are DHHR's numbers sometimes different from those reported by other sources?

A: Local health departments receive reports of cases in their areas before DHHR does. Some hospitals, meanwhile, can now test more quickly than before. As a result, these sources sometimes announce results before reporting them to DHHR.

In addition, some labs can report results electronically while others submit them on paper. This disparity can also delay the receipt of results by DHHR.

As CDC explains: “State and local public health departments are now testing and publicly reporting their cases. In the event of a discrepancy between CDC cases and cases reported by state and local public health officials, data reported by states should be considered the most up to date.”

Q: Why isn't DHHR updating these numbers more frequently?

A: DHHR's goal is to provide accurate and reliable information to West Virginians. The current approach provides the most reliable way to ensure solid data.

While reporting the number of known cases serves an important public purpose, **all West Virginians should be conducting themselves as if positive cases have been reported in their counties and communities.**

As Gov. Justice's Safer at Home executive order makes clear: West Virginians are still strongly encouraged to leave home only for essential activities. Social distancing and wearing a CDC-recommended mask or face covering is strongly encouraged and required in certain settings.

Q: Does a positive case reported in my county mean I should be tested?

A: Not everyone needs to be tested for COVID-19, even with known cases in their area. DHHR will provide specific guidance regarding testing whenever appropriate. Local health departments also have discretion regarding testing, as do individual health care providers. Guidance on testing is available from CDC, which also offers an online “Self-Checker” tool: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/testing.html>.

Q: I've been tested, but I've not received my results. Can DHHR or my local health department provide them?

A: Contact the provider or lab that tested you for your results. The DHHR state lab and the local health departments can only provide results for tests they conducted.

