

Illinois delivers more than 269,000 vaccines; 126,111 vaccinated thus far

Average COVID-19 case positivity rate stays below 8 percent for 11 days

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SPRINGFIELD — As Illinois' COVID-19 hospitalization and case numbers have stabilized since the second-wave highs last month, the governor's office announced 126,211 vaccinations were administered throughout the state, including Chicago, as of Tuesday evening.

The state has delivered 108,225 vaccine doses of Pfizer and 161,400 doses of Moderna to hospitals throughout the state, not including Chicago, according to Gov. JB Pritzker's spokesperson.

On Wednesday, the Illinois Department of Public Health reported 7,374 new confirmed and probable cases of COVID-19 in Illinois, and 178 additional deaths caused by the virus.

The state's death toll has reached 16,357 among 955,380 cases and more than 13 million test results reported since the beginning of the pandemic.

As of Tuesday night, 4,244 in Illinois were hospitalized with COVID-19, a decrease of 69 from the prior day, leaving roughly 28 percent of hospital beds available statewide.

Of those, 882 COVID-19 patients were in the ICU, a decrease of 22 from the prior day, and 496 patients with COVID-19 were on ventilators, a decrease of 10 from the day prior. That left about 22 percent of ICU beds available statewide, and about 72 percent of ventilators available statewide.

The preliminary seven-day statewide case positivity rate from Dec. 23 – Dec. 29, is 7.6 percent, which is two-tenths of a percentage point higher than the seven-day average case positivity rate reported Tuesday.

The seven-day statewide case positivity rate has remained below 8 percent for 11 consecutive days. From Nov. 7 to Dec. 7, that rate stayed above 10 percent, prompting Pritzker to implement Tier 3 mitigations throughout the state on Nov. 20.

Out of the state's 11 mitigation regions, only four regions — Regions 3, 4, 5 and 10 — have not met the conditions laid out

by the Pritzker administration to return to Tier 2 mitigations, from Tier 3.

The other six regions have experienced a test positivity rate less than 12 percent for three consecutive days, had greater than 20 percent available intensive care unit and medical or surgical bed availability for three consecutive days, and saw a decline in the number of COVID-19 patients in the hospital in at least 7 out of the last 10 days.

Although Tier 2 mitigations still prohibit indoor dining at restaurants or bars, a return to Tier 2 mitigations would lessen strict capacity limits at retail stores and other Illinois businesses, and allow casinos and video gambling terminals to reopen, for example.

When Pritzker was asked about returning to Tier 2 last week, he said has no immediate plans to lift the Tier 3 mitigations currently in effect statewide.

"The challenge that we have is, what we don't want to do is swing back and forth between mitigations and not having mitigations within days or a week or two of one another," Pritzker said. "We need to bring it down even further and for a longer period of time."

Illinois Department of Public Health Monitoring New Coronavirus Variant

State Is Increasing Surveillance For New Variant

SPRINGFIELD — A new variant of the virus that causes COVID-19 has been identified in the United Kingdom. Cases have been reported in two states and are not known to be linked to travel, which could indicate community spread. No cases caused by this new variant have been confirmed in Illinois yet. As more information is learned, IDPH will provide updates and notify the public if/when the variant is detected in Illinois. Illinois is increasing its surveillance for the variant by performing genomic sequence testing on an increased number of specimens that have been collected.

"Viruses are constantly changing through mutation and variant virus are expected," said Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike. "At this time, we have no evidence that infections by this variant cause more severe disease or death. However, early study shows the variant may spread more easily and quickly. We will continue to work with academic partners, laboratory researchers, physicians, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to monitor for cases."

Virus mutation is common and can emerge and disappear quickly. Some mutations can emerge that help a virus spread more easily, cause infection to be more or less severe, or lead to resistance to treatments or vaccines. Based on the information available now, the effectiveness of the vaccine has not changed.

Public health experts are working to better understand the potential impact of this variant, including how the variant spreads and how it affects people who are infected. The same measures that have helped protect Illinoisans from COVID-19 will also help protect residents from the variant. Wearing a mask, staying at least 6 feet apart from others, avoiding crowds, ventilating indoor spaces, and washing hands frequently remain the best tools for preventing the spread of this virus, no matter the strain.

Whither the GOP in Illinois?

By JIM NOWLAN

Written in quill pen (not literally; it was 1965), my master's thesis was about "Leaderless Politics: The Illinois Republican Party." Not much has changed.

That was an era when party organization mattered. My thesis was that when Republicans lost control of the governorship, the party became leaderless. Not much has changed. Back then, political patronage provided party leaders with influence over elections. My research showed that under GOP Gov. Bill Stratton (1953-60), 83 of the state's 102 Republican county chairmen held state jobs. Guess who ran the party? Without a governor and jobs, the party was rudderless.

First, TV in the 1960s and now billionaire self-funders and donors have replaced political party organizations as the primary conduits to the voters. Patronage is mostly gone, by Supreme Court dictum. Political parties have traditionally had three basic functions:
· Set forth a platform of values and policies for voters to consider;
· Recruit attractive candidates, and
· Work to nominate the candidates in the primary and then get them elected, so they can implement the platform inside government.

The Illinois Republican Party does little of this anymore. The role of party platforms has been underappreciated.

Party leaders used to wrestle over platform planks at their conventions. The platforms, by a kind of osmosis and over time, provided helpful cues for voters. That is, the GOP favors small business, while the Dems are for the working stiff. Most of that is gone today, and voters are adrift, captivated yet confused by a Tower of Babel issuing relentlessly from the internet.

The Illinois state GOP is a paper tiger. It has no money nor clout over county parties. The county parties are mostly toothless as well. There are exceptions. For example, county GOP chairs Jan Weber in Henry and Aren Hansen in Grundy have in recent years almost singlehandedly turned local offices from Dem to GOP. Mary Brookhart in McDonough County also has a strong county party; her team knows how to get out the vote.

The Illinois GOP is at present recruiting a new statewide party chair. Different from a number of states that have large, professional staff and paid chairs, the Illinois party has but one staffer (very sharp Derek Murphy) and a volunteer chair. With megabucks ex-Governor Bruce Rauner gone, the state party has barely two nickels to rub together.

The struggle for party control, as if it mattered, is apparently between a Trump-thumping faction versus an "establishment" faction, neither with a clear platform.

The old adage that "all politics is local" is no longer true. Successful local candidates in small town and rural Illinois tend to feel they must pay more than lip service to the Trump brand of nativist populism.

This effectively leaves lifestyle tolerant, pro-choice, balanced budget, free market, business-friendly folks like me outside the party, or so I feel. What does the future hold for the Illinois GOP? I expect to see Trump 2024 signs soon replacing the thousands of the

2020 versions on lawns and farmyards across mid-America; however, insiders I talk with predict the Trump brand will fade rather quickly, as he likely becomes ensnarled in nasty tax and legal problems. Over the past half century, Republican leaders have also seen their base slip away, literally. Since about 1970, two million or so whites have departed the state in net terms, replaced largely by Latinos and, to a lesser extent, Asian-Americans.

When I was a state legislator in 1970, 12 percent of Illinois residents were of a minority group; today, it is 36 percent. From 1977 to 2003, the Illinois GOP enjoyed a 26-year, unbroken string of Republican governors. In contrast, this year Joe Biden clobbered Trump in Illinois 57-40 percent, in what pundits call a firmly Blue state.

The big prize in 2022 will be the governor's mansion, not that anyone lives there anymore. Gov. JB Pritzker is considered vulnerable, following his botched, disastrous campaign for increased taxes on high earners, and because of the unenviable role he has in trying to corral COVID-19.

In a district on the edges of metropolitan Chicago, GOP Congressman Adam Kinzinger has been critical of Trump while supportive of his policies. He appears to be positioning himself for a run for higher office — governor, close observers report.

I also find state Senators Jason Barickman of Bloomington and Sue Rezin of Morris attractive. Both are smart and capable, and might have some appeal in the suburbs. But they and other aspirants from the political ranks must nowadays almost expect outsider megabucks sorts to crash into the GOP's party.

The race will be wide open, and the leaderless state GOP will be but a bystander.

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