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COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Gov. Beshear: Health Care Heroes Appreciation Week
Begins Aug. 22**

Kentucky reaches record COVID-19 ICU admissions

FRANKFORT, Ky. (Aug. 19, 2021) – On Thursday during his weekly Team Kentucky update, Gov. Andy Beshear said Kentucky Health Care Heroes Appreciation Week will begin Aug. 22 as health care workers continue extraordinary efforts to treat patients during the surge in COVID-19 hospitalizations and record ICU admissions.

“Kentucky’s health care teams are tired. They are overworked and have been for 17 months. We have asked a lot of them, and they have stepped up yet again to work countless hours to save lives in every corner of the commonwealth. Now, we need to lift them up,” said **Gov. Beshear**. “Like many of us, they were undoubtedly relieved a few months ago when it looked like this crisis was winding down. But now they are having to hold hands again while people they met just a few days

ago take their final breaths. We call them health care heroes because they've earned that title and continue to earn it every day and every night."

The Governor encouraged media outlets, businesses, restaurants, communities and families to "lift these amazing people up and give them new energy."

The Governor noted that, as of this morning, Alabama [has run out](#) of ICU beds, and in one Florida school district, more than 10,000 students [have been quarantined](#) just a week into the school year. Kentucky health care workers and COVID-19 survivors emphasized the life-or-death stakes of Kentuckians signing up for their vaccines as younger and younger patients are becoming critically ill with the delta variant and filling up hospitals.

"I was very, very big on 'anti-COVID,' 'anti-vaccine.' I made Facebook posts, made a point to not wear a mask and made a point to say that COVID wasn't important. And I am eating crow on it, because I experienced it," said **Ethan Koehler of Benton**, who shared the story of his life-threatening battle with COVID-19. "I laid in a hospital bed in so much pain that my wife, who is a nurse, and her coworkers were just trying to calm me down from how much pain I was in. Fighting for breath, that was when I realized: This is really bad. I can't even tough it out. I think of myself as a guy that can handle some stuff, and I'm on a hospital bed and I can't even sit still.

"The doctors up there did above and beyond what they could have done and saved my life," he added. "Having COVID, I wouldn't wish it on anybody. It's because of COVID I have to fight now every day to get a little bit better. I'm relearning how to walk without catching my breath. If I had known six months ago that a vaccination would have taken even half of my struggles the last month out, I would have gotten it in a heartbeat and I would have never looked back."

"One of the things I wanted to stress for our community is that you're not just doing this for yourself," said **William Moss, MD, emergency room medical director at Med Center Health in Bowling Green**. "When we're crowding the hospitals with COVID-19 cases, that's somebody's neighbor whose arm is broken who will have to wait longer; that's somebody's neighbor who is going to have a heart attack and possibly have a delay in getting care; that's somebody who is going to have a stroke and because emergency medical services (EMS) have so many runs, they're not going to get to the hospital as quickly as they can. I want people to

realize that stopping this surge is something that we're doing for each other. Please consider getting the COVID-19 vaccination."

"The Medical Center at Bowling Green is at capacity. Critical care units are full," said **Katrina Wood, RN, MSN, CNML, Med Center Health chief nursing officer**. "We are unable to accept patients from outlying facilities who we normally take and who need our help. Our emergency departments have patients waiting for critical care almost every day. The way the community can help us take care of you is to get vaccinated."

"The hospitals that we usually call when patients need that higher level of care are now calling us looking for available beds," said **Trish Smith, director of the Appalachian Regional Healthcare command center**. "I hear the distress, the worry and the concern in their voices that patients will die if they don't find the right level of care soon enough. Around 97% of the COVID-19 patients in our hospitals are unvaccinated. I am deeply concerned that we will not have the capacity to care for the next trauma patient, the next family member that has a stroke, the next neighbor having a heart attack."

"We're seeing a significant increase in the number of COVID patients both in the hospital and in our outpatient clinics. We're using high-flow oxygen and ventilators at rates that we've never seen before in this hospital," said **John Godfrey, MD, vice president and chief medical officer of Baptist Health Hardin in Elizabethtown**. "We really need everyone's help."

"We are no different than any other facility in the state of Kentucky: We are facing staffing challenges against rising patient volumes," said **Sharon Wright, vice president and chief nursing officer at Baptist Health Hardin**.

"What's different this time around is that we now have a vaccine," added **Dennis Johnson, president and chief executive officer of Baptist Health Hardin**. "We know that while this vaccine is not perfect, it does four things that we've witnessed right here at our hospital: It reduces severity of illness, reduces hospitalizations, reduces ICU admissions and most important, reduces deaths. We're pleading with every Kentuckian to please get vaccinated, wear a mask and practice good hand hygiene and social distancing. Together we can wipe out this pandemic."

Dr. Steven Stack, commissioner of the Kentucky Department for Public Health (KDPH), also encouraged Kentuckians to wear masks in schools and in high-risk indoor settings.

“Influenza data shows that masks work right here in Kentucky,” said Dr. Stack. “For the influenza season right before and at the very beginning of the COVID pandemic, 2019-2020, Kentucky had 27,408 confirmed influenza cases. For that entire season before COVID, we had 165 influenza deaths. For 2020-2021 – so the winter we have just concluded when COVID was in its huge surge – we only had 186 confirmed influenza cases. So that’s 27,408 the year before compared to 186 for the most recent year. We only had two known deaths from influenza last year. So the masks work, folks.”

COVID-19 Update

Dr. Stack said hospitals are facing a variety of challenges caring for patients right now, including: inability to transfer pediatric patients to children’s hospitals due to lack of available beds; health care staffing shortages; inability to transfer patients to higher levels of care due to lack of available beds at other hospitals; needing to use crisis standards of care, where each nurse and/or nursing assistant must care for more patients than they normally would; in some cases, needing to cancel elective or non-emergency procedures in order to free up staff and resources; ongoing EMS staffing shortages amid increased requests for transfers; and individuals coming to emergency departments solely for COVID-19 testing.

Yesterday, Dr. Stack and Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS) Secretary Eric Friedlander signed a [directive](#) allowing people licensed to practice medicine or nursing in other states to serve on an emergency basis in Kentucky.

From March 1 to Aug. 18, 2021, 85.3% of COVID-19 cases, 90.3% of COVID-19 hospitalizations and 87.4% of COVID-19 deaths were among partially vaccinated or unvaccinated Kentuckians.

As of today, 2,436,044 Kentuckians have received at least their first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine; 6,935 have been vaccinated over the past 24 hours.

Yesterday, 3,576 new cases were reported and the state’s COVID-19 test positivity rate was 12.59%. As of yesterday, 1,658 Kentuckians with COVID-19 are hospitalized; a record 466 are in the ICU; and 229 are on ventilators.

From March to May 2021, 6% of COVID-19 deaths were among Kentuckians younger than 50 years old; from June to August 2021, 16% of COVID-19 deaths were among Kentuckians younger than 50 years old.

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. 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.

Dr. Stack Updates Kentuckians on Third mRNA Vaccine Doses

Dr. Stack says right now, the only people eligible for a third dose of an mRNA vaccine (Pfizer or Moderna) are individuals with moderate to severe immunocompromised conditions.

“If you are one of those people, you can go to a pharmacy or clinic and get your third dose,” said Dr. Stack. “I have written a [letter](#) deeming that all full-time, long-term care residents qualify for a third dose by virtue of the medical conditions that put residents in these facilities and the high mortality rate in these facilities for much of the pandemic.”

Dr. Stack added that about one month from now, the week of Sept. 20, people who have had their second dose eight months or more before will likely be able to get a third dose, whether or not they are immunocompromised.

COVID-19 Vaccines Available without Appointment, Insurance at Kentucky State Fair

Today, Gov. Beshear said a free, safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine is available at the [Kentucky State Fair](#). The Cabinet for Health and Family Services will host vaccination clinics Aug. 19-28 from noon to 6 p.m. EDT. No appointments are necessary.

Anyone who meets vaccination eligibility can get a vaccine. After waiting a short period, visitors can return to state fair fun with a \$30 all-you-can-ride wristband from WellCare of Kentucky and \$20 gift card – rewards for anyone who gets vaccinated at the fair.

Kentucky National Guard Receives Federal Approval to Continue Supporting Pandemic Response

Today, Gov. Beshear announced that the Kentucky National Guard has received approval to continue supporting the state's pandemic response thanks to federal funding that will continue through the calendar year. Since the pandemic began, Kentucky National Guard has assisted Kentuckians at testing and vaccination sites, food pantries, medical facilities and more.

"Throughout the pandemic, the Kentucky National Guard has been an incredible partner supporting our COVID-19 response across the commonwealth," said Gov. Beshear. "This is great news for Team Kentucky because, as many of our hospitals are nearing capacity as the delta variant surges, KNG can give help where it's needed most."

Gov. Beshear Requests Individual Assistance from Federal Government for Nicholas County Flood Event

Gov. Beshear submitted a [request](#) to President Joe Biden today to issue a Major Disaster Declaration and fund individual assistance to eligible residents in Nicholas County who were impacted by the once-in-a-thousand-year flood event that occurred July 29-30, 2021.

Kentucky's Economy and Workforce Strengthen as State Fights Delta Variant

Today, Gov. Beshear highlighted two economic and workforce development announcements as Kentuckians work to protect the commonwealth's economic momentum during the fight against the COVID-19 delta variant:

- **Eddie Kane Steel to Construct Processing Facility, Create 25 Jobs in Meade County:** This week, Gov. Beshear announced 25 new, high-paying jobs for Kentuckians across the coming years as part of Eddie Kane Steel Products Inc.'s plans to construct a \$4.8 million steel processing facility in Meade County. To learn more, see the [full release](#).
- **Kentucky Programs Powering Skills Training for 18,000-plus Kentuckians:** This week, the Governor announced nearly 18,300 Kentuckians are expected to receive skills training thanks to support provided through the Bluegrass State Skills Corp., a group attached to the Kentucky Cabinet for Economic Development that helps private-sector businesses establish industry-specific training programs. To learn more, see the [full release](#).

Price Gouging

Gov. Beshear renewed an executive order prohibiting price gouging. To file a price gouging complaint with the attorney general's office, click [here](#).

Team Kentucky All-Stars

Today, Gov. Beshear recognized Team Kentucky All-Stars: parents from Clark Elementary School in Paducah who donated 18 picnic tables to the school so students could eat lunch and even have some classes outside.

"This is both fun for the kids and reduces the risk of COVID-19 transmission," said Gov. Beshear. "I challenge all of us to follow these parents' example and see what more we can do to protect our friends, neighbors, community and our kids."

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