

# Dozens of Iowa students quarantine as virus cases rise

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Dozens of students in Iowa schools were quarantined after both staff and students tested positive for the coronavirus, while a high school switched to online classes after some students were absent as cases surged

Thursday by more than 1,300 across the state in the last 24 hours.

An Iowa [elementary school](#) quarantined 130 elementary students after a staff member tested positive for coronavirus, while a [high school](#) switched to online classes after some students were absent as [coronavirus](#) cases surged Thursday by more than 1,300 across the state in the last 24 hours.

Officials at the Hartwick-Ladora-Victor Community School District quarantined 130 kindergarten through sixth grade students beginning Wednesday after a staff member tested positive for the virus a day earlier, Superintendent Brad Hohensee said.

The district has no mask requirement, though it has posted a notice on its website that it began requiring masks at indoor athletic events on Sept. 20. The district is based in Victor, nearly 76 miles east of Des Moines.

North Scott High School, which is quarantining more than 200 high [school](#) students due to positive tests, went to all online instruction last Friday, according to a Sept. 17 letter the school sent to the Iowa Department of Education.

The district, based in Eldridge in eastern Iowa, said its absentee rate has spiked since school started Sept. 1 and was 23% at the high school as of Sept. 18.

"We anticipate this number will continue to rise with the amount of students we have out with symptoms," the district wrote in its notification to the state. North Scott Superintendent Joe Stutting himself went into quarantine after announcing on Aug. 29 he tested positive.

There are 14 counties exceeding a 15% positivity rate, the threshold Republican Gov. Kim Reynolds has set for which school districts can

seek at-home learning temporarily. That level is three times higher than the 5% rate recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other medical professionals. Reynolds requires at least half of a school district's educational offering to be in person unless they seek to go online due to high positivity rates or absentees.

North Iowa, Iowa City and Ames received state approval and are temporarily using a remote learning option. Requests from Lynnville-Sully and Fremont-Mills are under review, an Iowa Department of Education spokeswoman said.

Sioux County, in northwestern Iowa, has the highest positivity rate at 30.6%, which Reynolds acknowledged Tuesday is extremely high and that health officials are investigating.

The Sibley-Ocheyedan district in neighboring Osceola County has 201 students and staff in isolation or quarantine as of Wednesday after 18 students and eight staff members tested positive. Superintendent James Craig is among them due to close contact with a confirmed case. The district, despite the county's 27.3% positivity rate, continued Thursday to hold in-school lessons.

"We are putting together new social distancing guidelines for our district that will help slow the spread in our district," Craig said in an email.

Becky Drissell, a 41-year-old resident of Sioux Center and treasurer of the Sioux County Democrats, said people aren't wearing masks or practicing social distance. She said she home schools her children,

"The political climate has just dismissed it," Drissell said referring to masks. "Even as President Trump has pulled back a little bit more and endorsed mask wearing, around here nobody wears masks and nobody social distances."

Northwest Iowa is a heavily Republican area. Trump carried Sioux County in 2016 with 80% of the presidential vote, and Reynolds carried the county in 2018 with more than 85% of governor votes.

When asked at a press conference Tuesday whether it's more difficult for her to tell constituents there to improve their behavior, Reynolds rejected the premise that political influence is a factor.

"I'm not making decision based on politics, and I don't appreciate you indicating as such," she said. "I've tried to be very specific in doing evidence-based decisions based on data. I don't know what's going on up there."

Reynolds is one of a few Republican governors to reject mask mandates and currently has bars closed only in two counties where the largest state universities are located.

Iowa reported 1,341 new confirmed cases in the last 24 hours as of Thursday morning and six additional deaths, bringing the state total to 1,299 deaths.

The Des Moines Register/Mediacom Iowa Poll published Thursday indicated a significant drop in Iowa's approval of Reynolds' virus response.

The poll found 47% of Iowans say they disapprove of the job she has done while 44% approve. That's a 15 percentage-point drop since June. Selzer & Co. conducted the poll of 803 Iowa adults from Sept. 14-17. The margin of error is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

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