

# Arkansas virus hospitalizations go up by 106 over weekend

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The number of people hospitalized due to the coronavirus jumped by 106 over the weekend in Arkansas, which is leading the nation in new virus cases per capita.

The Department of Health said Monday that the state's virus

hospitalizations increased to 787. Of those, 291 patients are in intensive care and 124 patients are on ventilators. Most of the new hospitalizations, 79, occurred since Sunday, the department said.

The state's virus cases increased over the past three days by 2,552 to 365,132 total since the pandemic began. The state reported 15 new deaths. The department recently stopped reporting daily COVID-19 numbers on weekends, releasing the figures on Monday instead.

Arkansas' cases have surged in recent weeks because of the delta variant of the virus and a low number of people getting vaccinated. Only 35% of the state's population is fully vaccinated, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Over the past two weeks, the rolling average number of daily new cases has increased by 114%, according to figures compiled by Johns Hopkins University researchers.

Republican Gov. Asa Hutchinson this month embarked on a statewide tour, holding town halls aimed at encouraging people to get vaccinated. Hutchinson on Monday said he'll hold four more town halls next week in Mountain Home, Dumas, Heber Springs and Siloam Springs.

"It's critical we continue to have these discussions around Arkansas to ensure people have the facts and science behind these vaccines," Hutchinson said in a statement.

The governor said nearly 16,000 additional vaccine doses were administered over the weekend.

Dr. Jose Romero, the state's health secretary, planned to meet Tuesday at the Health Department with Dr. Bechara Choucair, the vaccinations coordinator for the White House COVID-19 response team, a

department spokeswoman said.

About 21% of the state's 8,817 hospital beds and 5% of its 1,066 intensive care unit beds are currently available, the department said.

The state also announced that a Texas man won \$1 million from a scratch-off ticket he received in exchange for getting his vaccination. Gary Smith, an Arkansas native who lives in Arlington, got the ticket after receiving his second dose of the vaccine at a local health unit.

The state has offered the \$20 tickets, as well as gift certificates for hunting or fishing licenses, as incentives to get vaccinated. Smith was the first to win \$1 million from the virus incentive tickets, though others have won amounts ranging from \$20 to \$500.

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