



LRO SNAPSHOT

Nebraska Legislature Research Office Policy Brief • 3/20/2020

Covid-19 Pandemic: Where is Nebraska Headed?

By LRO Staff

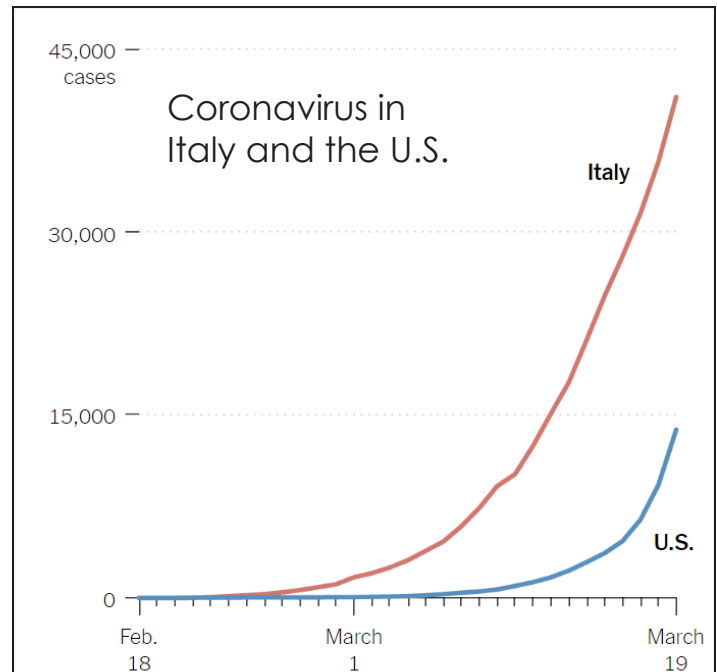
The impact of the global coronavirus pandemic has been profound, changing the lives of everyone on the planet, seemingly overnight. There are now tens of thousands of cases in the United States and hundreds have died. Governors in Ohio, New York, California, Illinois, Connecticut and New Jersey have locked down their states, telling millions of people to shelter in place. [Epidemiological models](#) suggest that the pandemic could last six months, or even longer.

Covid-19 represents the most serious public health threat seen in a respiratory virus since the 1918 H1N1 influenza pandemic. In that pandemic, communities in the United States responded with a variety of nonpharmaceutical interventions — measures intended to reduce transmission by reducing contact rates in the general population.

This is what is now occurring in Nebraska and around the country.

With dozens of cases across the state and confirmed community spread in Omaha, Nebraska has imposed its first [Directed Health Measure](#) to combat Covid-19. This order allows the government to shut down restaurants and limit public gatherings to 10 or fewer people across the state. These restrictions do not apply to grocery stores, pharmacies, airports, bus and train stations, health care facilities, shopping malls, and other spaces where people are “in transit.”

If Nebraskans are able to follow these guidelines, it is hoped the pandemic can be brought under control. According to public health experts, shutting down



Source: New York Times

“When you’re on an exponential curve, every moment is dangerous,” - Francis Collins, Director of the National Institutes of Health.

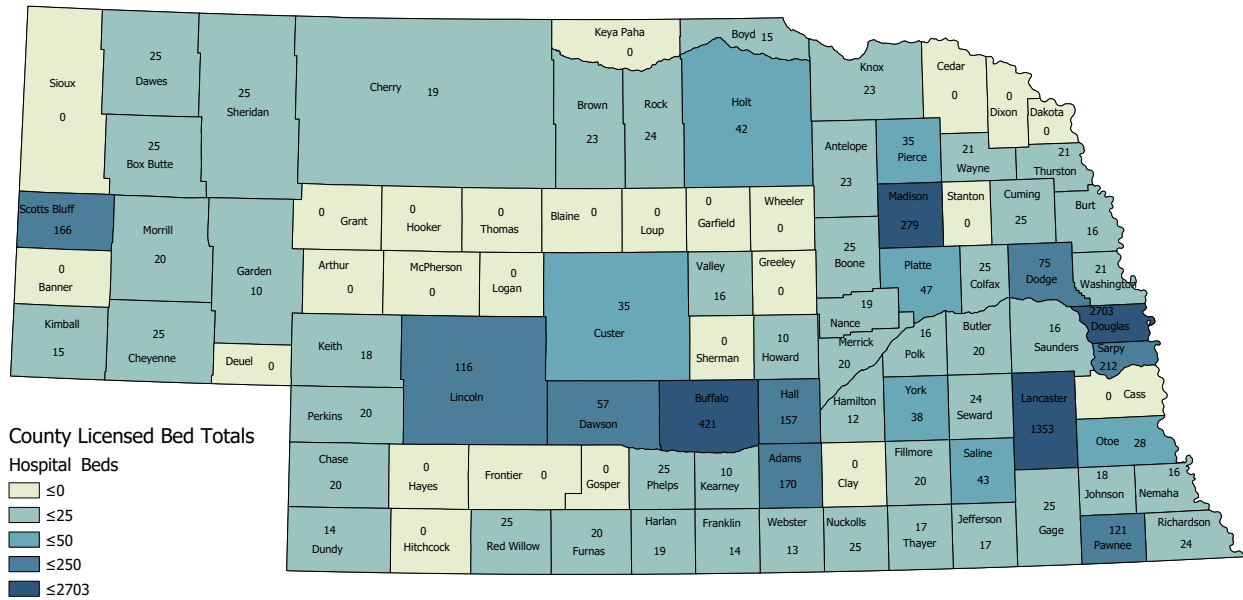
Covid-19 is one of the most aggressively contagious pathogens of its type ever encountered, infecting some populations, such as Italy, at an exponential rate. However, examples of “bending the curve” from South Korea and Japan offer hope.

mass gatherings is one of the most effective strategies to combat virus outbreaks. Social distancing, in combination with other interventions — testing, isolation of cases, school closure, etc. — has the potential to lower the rate of contagion. It is important to suppress transmission below so-called “R=1” the threshold required to bring the virus under control.

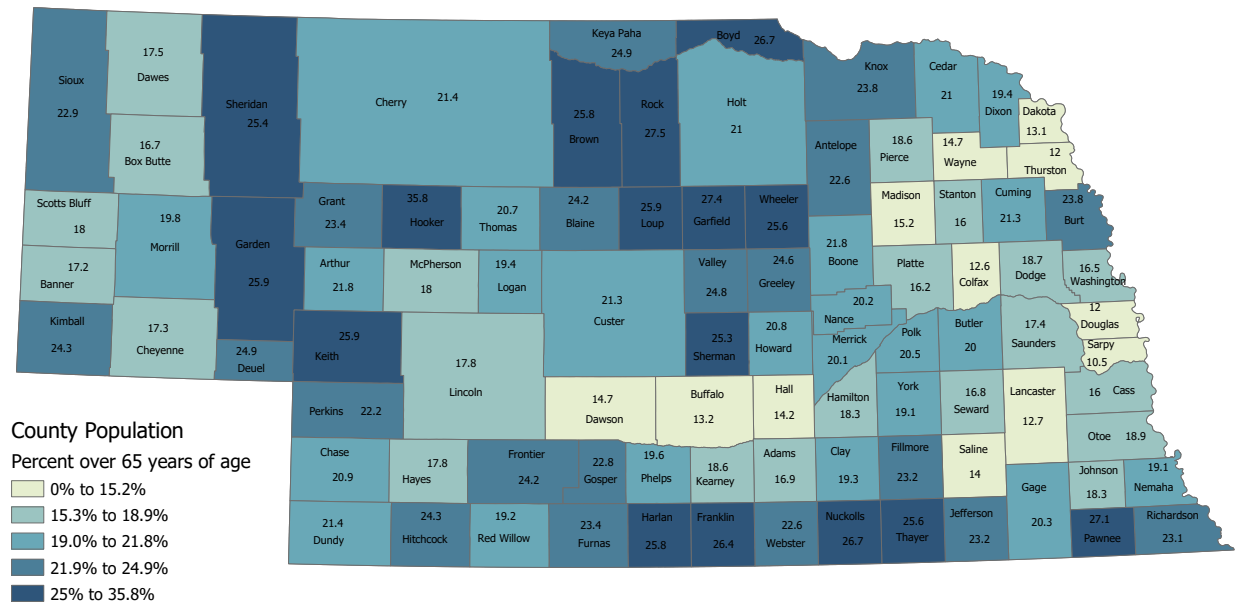


The coronavirus pandemic will not affect all populations evenly. Older people in rural areas with less access to health care facilities will be more vulnerable to Covid-19. Data from other states and countries shows that the majority of ICU admissions and deaths have been occurring in people over 65.

Licensed Hospital Beds by County



Percent of Population over 65 by County





What it is the outlook for Nebraska?

It is important to note that given Covid-19 is a newly emergent virus, much remains to be understood about its transmission characteristics. That said, the World Health Organization (WHO) and Centers for Disease Control (CDC) [estimate](#) that between 40 percent to 70 percent of Americans could eventually be infected with Covid-19. Based on an average hospitalization rate of [10 percent](#), if half of Nebraska's 1.9 million residents are infected, there will eventually be 95,000 beds needed to meet demand.

Nebraska only has 6,958 hospital beds total.

The idea of "flattening the curve" is to ensure that all those beds are not needed at once, as is now happening in Italy. It is possible the social distancing measures now underway will mitigate the effects enough for Nebraska to avoid a major outbreak, as is occurring in other states. Pharmaceutical researchers caution that it will likely be at least 12-18 months before a vaccine is available.

Government Response

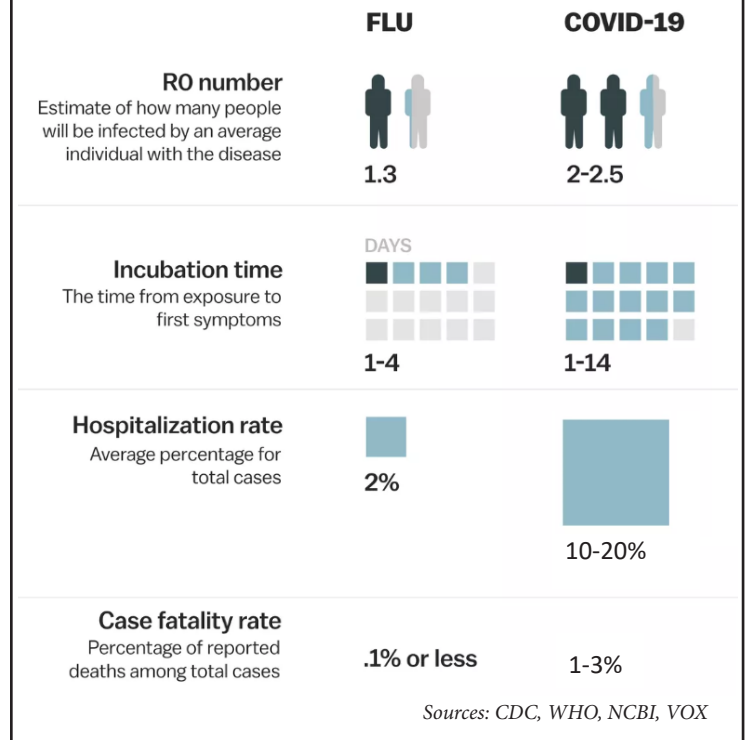
So far, Nebraska government officials have taken the following steps to address this crisis:

Executive Branch — Governor Ricketts has asked for an emergency appropriation of \$58 million to help fight the spread of the virus in the state:

- \$38 million for local response efforts;
- \$4 million for DHHS staffing;
- \$13 million for surge staffing at Veterans Hospitals and DHHS care facilities;
- \$515,000 for UNMC COVID-19 lab testing;
- \$2.5 million for lab equipment, software program and personnel;
- \$100,000 for UV Light boxes; and
- \$343,900 for a knowledge center.

According to Dr. Gary Anthonie, Director of Public Health for DHHS, Nebraska health facilities are working to speed up testing for Covid-19. Currently,

The Flu vs. Covid-19



the Nebraska Public Health Lab and Nebraska Medicine are each equipped to perform 100 tests per day, and commercial labs are preparing to test as well.

As of this writing, 51 Nebraskans have been diagnosed with Covid-19, but there are likely many more carrying the virus. Testing thus far has been reserved for high risks individuals, such as those exhibiting severe symptoms, health care workers, and people who have had close contact with an infected individual.

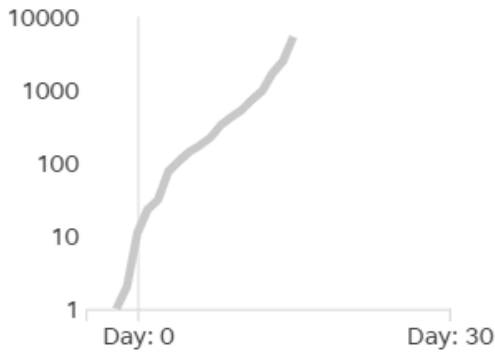
Judicial Branch — Currently, all Nebraska trial courts are open. Some counties may have enacted restrictions, which may include, but are not limited to:

- Restricting or ending jury trials;
- Health checks on entering courtrooms;
- Closing courts for cleaning;

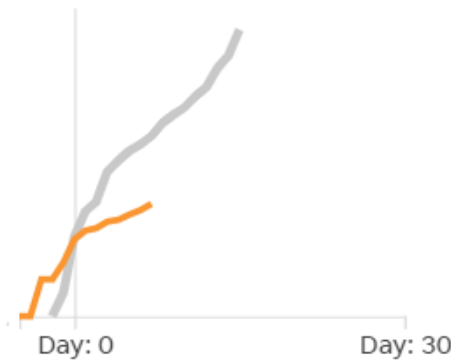


Covid-19 Nebraska Cases vs. Other States

New York

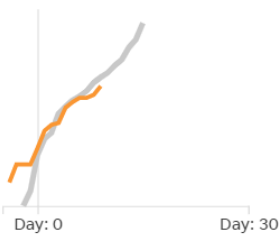


Nebraska

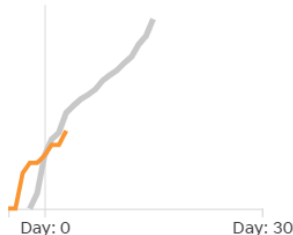


New York has the most confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the nation and is quickly running out of ICU beds. These charts show the cumulative number of cases in Nebraska compared to New York, by days since the 10th confirmed case. Infections are growing in all the states surrounding Nebraska as well.

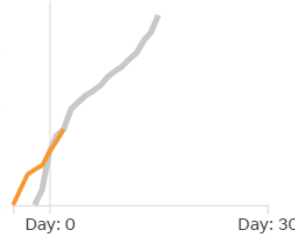
Colorado



Kansas



Missouri



Source: Johns Hopkins University

- Granting extension for court deadlines, including deadlines to pay fees/fines; and
- Requiring teleconferences and videoconferences in lieu of hearings.

Legislative Branch: Speaker Scheer has suspended the legislative session. Session will be reconvened for an emergency appropriation on Monday, March 23 to deal with the outbreak. Many legislative offices are either working from home or operating with skeleton crews.

Schools: The State Department of Education has recommended that by Monday, March 23, schools across the state should close until further notice. School districts should work regionally by educational service unit to develop a plan to transition to an alternate learning environment. Schools should

be prepared to operate in the alternate learning environment for six to eight weeks, with a review of operations every two weeks, including plans for re-opening.

Nebraska Department of Corrections: No prisoners or correctional staff have tested positive for Covid-19 so far. NDCS has a pandemic plan in place, which includes cutting off prisoner visitation and limiting gatherings of inmates to 10 or less.

Local Health Resources: If you are showing signs and symptoms of COVID-19, please call your healthcare provider to be evaluated and determine if you need to be tested. For information about coronavirus in Nebraska, call the state hotline at 402-552-6645 (available daily between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m.) or check the [Department of Health and Human Services' website](#).