

**\*\*\*SPAM\*\*\* For Immediate Release**

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**From the Office of Sen. Joyce Waddell, NC Senate**  
Mecklenburg County

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Thursday, December 31, 2020

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## Greetings:

*We are moving closer to this year's end. I am prayerful that 2021 will bring healing, and some sense of normalcy for all. The General Assembly will begin the new 2021-2022 session on January 13th at 12:00 PM, and because of COVID restrictions they are only allowing incoming Senators-elect on the Senate floor to allow for social distancing. The newly elected Senators will be sworn in inside the chamber, while four of their guests can witness from the gallery. I am looking forward to new beginnings and hope to make good legislation.*

*Sincerely,*  
**Joyce Waddell**

## Moderna Vaccine

The arrival of a second COVID-19 vaccine in North Carolina this week should allow at least small numbers of people in all 100 counties to start getting inoculated against the virus. The state expects to receive 175,900 doses of the Moderna vaccine, which received emergency use authorization from the Food and Drug Administration on Friday.

Between 70,000 and 80,000 of those will go to local health departments and the 63 hospitals that did not receive any of the Pfizer vaccine last week, said the state secretary of Health and Human Services.

The federal government will distribute the rest to residents and staff at nursing homes and long-term care facilities, through contracts with CVS and Walgreens. CVS said Monday that it will begin administering vaccines in a dozen states this week and expects to start vaccinations in another 36 states, including North Carolina, on Dec. 28. CVS said it expects to vaccinate people at 899 skilled nursing and assisted living facilities in North Carolina over the next three months.

## Vaccine Mandates

The first vaccines for COVID-19 have arrived in North Carolina. But supplies are limited and mass vaccination remains far off. Still, once more doses are available, employers are likely to be thrust into a bind between wanting to prevent the virus and not provoking employee backlash. It's entirely legal for a business to require a vaccination, including for COVID-19, provided that religious and medical accommodations are made, according to health experts and lawyers. But whether employers will actually do that is another question altogether.

Statewide, North Carolina doesn't plan to require COVID-19 vaccination, according to a spokeswoman for the Secretary of the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services. That means that if any requirements are put in place, it will happen below the state level, or by employers. Some businesses could make a vaccine a requirement of employment, the spokesperson added. Only 5% of North Carolina businesses plan to mandate vaccination in order to work in-person, according to an informal survey of about 500 businesses conducted this month by human resources groups in the state. About 45% said they wouldn't require a vaccine, and the rest were undecided.

Most businesses likely will strongly encourage their employees to take the vaccine once it's available, but making it mandatory is much more thorny, according to a Charlotte-based employment lawyer at the firm Parker Poe. Requirements will likely differ from industry to industry, he said, with health care companies much more likely to mandate vaccination than tech, for example.

## COVID Cases

North Carolina reported 3,043 hospitalizations Wednesday, another new high for the state, as new cases and deaths continue increasing heading into Christmas. On Tuesday, the state topped 3,000 daily hospitalizations for the first time. The number of people in the hospital statewide has increased throughout December. On Dec. 1, there were 2,033 hospitalizations. There were 5,609 new cases reported on Wednesday, according to the state Department of Health and Human Services. That brings the seven-day average for daily new cases to 6,091, a new high for the state as well. It's the sixth straight day that the state has been above the 6,000 mark.

Of all the tests reported Monday, the latest day for which data is available, 10.7% of cases came back positive, bringing the seven-day positivity average to 10.8%. State health officials have said they want that number at or below 5%, a mark the state hasn't met since Sept. 24.

As of Wednesday, 6,360 North Carolinians have died due to the virus, an increase of 69 since Tuesday. The seven-day average for daily new deaths is now at 54. It's been in the 50s for nearly a week, and a month ago it was 32. Case and hospitalization data reported by DHHS is preliminary and subject to change upon further investigation.

## Eviction Moratorium

North Carolina residents facing eviction will get an extension until Jan. 31. The Governor instituted the current eviction moratorium by executive order Oct. 28. That order, in line with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention nationwide moratorium, was set to end on New Year's Eve, the same as the CDC order. "This holiday season, too many families are struggling to pay rent as the pandemic surges," the Governor said in a news release. "As the first of the month approaches and rent becomes due, I wanted people to know that we plan to extend the moratorium on evictions."

The details have yet to be determined and the Governor's extension will be based on how or whether Congress extends the CDC order, according to the release. On Dec. 11, state Chief Justice suspended all in-person, non-essential cases from taking place in state courthouses for 30 days because of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, eviction hearings also haven't been scheduled.

The U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate passed a \$900 billion COVID-19 stimulus Monday. In that bill, the CDC order was extended until Jan. 31. But the President criticized that bill on Tuesday, calling it a “disgrace.” The stimulus provides stimulus checks of \$600 per person. The President said the checks should be for \$2,000 per person. He also criticized spending in the part of the bill that funds the federal budget through the current fiscal year, which ends on Sept. 30 next year. He did not explicitly say he would veto the bill, but as of Wednesday afternoon he has yet to sign it, which would make the bill become law. Democratic Speaker of the House said on Twitter that the party is prepared to bring the \$2,000 check proposal to a vote on the House floor this week.

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## Community Spread

Nearly two-thirds of counties in North Carolina are now experiencing critical levels of coronavirus spread, according to the state’s county alert system updated Tuesday. The system’s color-coded map shows that 65 counties are red, indicating critical spread of the virus. Another 27 counties are orange, signifying substantial spread, meaning that only eight of the state’s 100 counties are in the lowest tier of yellow. Gov. Roy Cooper called the trend “alarming,” and noted that in the last week the state had set a daily record of more than 8,000 cases and that more than 10% of COVID-19 tests are now turning up positive.

“This virus continues to spread quickly,” Cooper said at a press conference Tuesday. “Don’t get numb to these numbers. They have plateaued a bit over the last few weeks, but they are too high.” December has been by far the worst month of the pandemic in North Carolina, with more than 120,000 new cases reported and more than 1,000 deaths. As of Tuesday, 488,902 people have tested positive in the state since the first case in early March, and 6,291 have died of COVID-19, according to the state Department of Health and Human Services.

Cooper cautioned residents not to travel for the upcoming holidays and invited faith leaders to speak about why it’s important for faith communities to observe the holidays safely — and ideally celebrate them virtually.

Cooper launched the county alert system on Nov. 17 to illustrate where the coronavirus is spreading the most. At the time, only 10 counties

were shown in red and 31 were orange. The colors are determined by measures such as the number of new cases per capita and the portion of tests that are positive. By Dec. 4, the increasing prevalence of the virus meant that 48 were red and 34 were orange.

The press conference came a day after Cooper issued an executive order allowing bars and restaurants to sell mixed drinks for takeout or delivery. The move, which Cooper said had the support of other top elected state officials on the Council of State, was aimed at helping the industry while discouraging people from gathering in large numbers where the coronavirus can spread. “We believe this will provide a safer situation and will also provide an important financial boost for bars and restaurants that are really hurting right now,” Cooper said Tuesday. Cooper did not announce any changes to the other coronavirus-related restrictions on businesses and the public.

During the press conference, Cooper urged people living in red or orange counties — the vast majority of state residents — to limit going out to essential activities. He said that applies to holiday activities as well. “North Carolina needs to drive down our numbers,” he said. “To do that, we need to change our holiday plans if we haven’t already. The best and safest option is to connect virtually or by phone. If you gather in person, keep it small and outside if you can. Get a COVID test before you go. Spread out the tables and chairs.”

The number of people hospitalized with COVID-19 on a given day has nearly doubled since mid-November, to 3,001 on Tuesday, a new high. But the pace of growth in hospitalizations has slowed, from about 20% a week in late November and early December to about 12% per week in the last two weeks, according to a group of researchers at The Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research.

## Rent Aid

North Carolina could get nearly \$700 million from the \$25 billion in rental assistance included in the new COVID-19 relief bill that congressional leaders agreed on over the weekend. The National Low Income Housing Coalition, a national nonprofit that advocates for more affordable housing, estimated how much money will go to each state and U.S. territory. Part of the estimated \$700 million will go to cities in the state with 200,000 or more people. The rest will go to the state government to disburse to more rural parts of North Carolina. The stimulus bill will also extend the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s nationwide eviction moratorium until Jan. 31. The CDC

order had been set to end on Dec. 31.

The rental assistance is part of a larger bill, The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021. That bill includes other COVID-19 relief worth \$900 billion and funding for the federal government's current fiscal year, which ends on Sept. 30 next year. The bill passed the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate on Monday. If signed by the President, it would become law.

The deputy communications director for the Governor's administration, told The N&O in an email that the stimulus from Congress is an important first step and that the Governor's office will carefully look at the legislation to determine how best to distribute the funds throughout the state.

***Christmas has come and gone! We are preparing for a different New Year's eve celebration - at home, socially distanced and masked. Please do your part by practicing safety habits.***

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