

Get the Facts:
Frequently Asked Questions About COVID-19 in Jackson County, NC
Last Update: September 29, 2020

Where can I look at the case count in Jackson County?

You can view Jackson County's case count at <http://health.jacksonnc.org/covid19-data-dashboard>.

Who is included in this case count?

This case count includes full-time Jackson County, NC residents.

Will WCU students be included in this case count?

Since WCU students will likely live in our community for an extended period of time, we consider them full-time residents. To make sure that they are accounted for in our Dashboard, we ask that they give their local address to their healthcare provider when they get tested. Positive students will be reported to whatever address they gave their healthcare provider when they get tested. If they give a Jackson County address, it will immediately come to JCDPH. If they gave their parent's address, it would go to the health department where their parents live. However, each health department does something called case investigation where they call positive cases to seek additional information (like "where are you residing right now?") At that point, if the health department staff member finds out that the student is actually in Jackson County, they will forward the case to us. We will be able to include the positive student in our case count then.

What about cases that work or have traveled to Jackson County but don't live in Jackson County?

When a person tests positive for COVID-19 (or any reportable communicable disease), the healthcare provider that tested that person sends their result to the health department where that person resides (i.e their home health department). The positive case's home health department may reach out to JCDPH, if during their case investigation, staff at that health department determine that their positive case may have close contacts in our community. If notified, JCDPH would work diligently to assist that home health department in any way possible. And know that JCDPH will always be involved in clusters or outbreaks identified in Jackson County.

Why does the State's case count not always match Jackson County's case count?

JCDPH reports information as soon as it is confirmed and vetted locally. NC DHHS's Dashboard often lags behind ours because it is dependent on entry into an electronic system called NC EDSS. Sometimes lab results feed directly into NC EDSS. Jackson County staff confirm information on the results (such as addresses) which may alter the case counts in future reports.

Are the cases that the Health Department reports active cases or antibody cases?

Most testing done by healthcare providers determines if a patient has an active COVID-19 infection. This is done with PCR/molecular testing or antigen testing. Another type of testing available is called antibody (or serology) testing. Antibody testing does not detect the actual COVID-19 virus but rather looks for antibodies that are produced when your body fights an infection. Antibody testing may help determine if you have been infected at some point with COVID-19 but more research still needs to be done to determine its accuracy. Healthcare providers may choose to test patients for active COVID-19 infection as well as for COVID-19 antibodies-- **however, only lab confirmed cases of active COVID-19 infection are reportable to the Health Department. Therefore, only lab confirmed cases of active COVID-19 infection are included in our case count.**

How does the Health Department decide what type of data to release to the community?

JCDPH considers 4 factors before releasing data to the community:

1. Would releasing this data breach patient confidentiality?
2. Do we have a clear, widely accepted definition for this type of data?
3. Do we have access to this data on a regular, consistent basis? Is this something we know we will be able to report to our community with frequency?
4. Does this data help our community get a better picture of disease burden in Jackson County?

If, by our assessment, a data request does not meet these qualifiers, we do not release it.

Why doesn't the Health Department share how many people have recovered from COVID-19?

Unfortunately, we do not have a clear, widely accepted definition of "recovered." In fact, NC DHHS agrees and only shares a "best guess" on the number of North Carolinians who have likely recovered from COVID-19. If you wish to review NC DHHS's estimate on patients presumed to be recovered, click [here](#). Additionally, we do not yet know the long term effects of COVID-19 on those who have been infected with it. We won't define those who have been released from isolation as "recovered" because we don't know that to be true.

We know that people with COVID-19 are likely infectious (meaning they can spread the virus to others) for ~9 days which is why we require an isolation period of 10 days.

How do I know if I've been exposed to a positive case of COVID-19?

Part of JCDPH's communicable disease investigation includes reaching out to the close contacts of persons who tested positive for a disease like COVID-19. Therefore, if you were exposed, the Health Department will call you, assess your risk of exposure, and share additional measures you need to take (if any).

It is important to remember that we have wide community spread of COVID-19, meaning that the virus is prevalent in our community. All should be taking precautionary measures and acting like everyone has COVID-19 (because they could and just don't know it yet).

What should I do if I think I need to get tested for COVID-19?

If you are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, follow [CDC guidelines](#) to prevent further spread and call your healthcare provider. It is very important that you **CALL FIRST** so that you do not accidentally expose others to the virus.

Can I get tested for COVID-19 at JCDPH?

You may be able to. Call JCDPH for more information.

Where else can I get tested for COVID-19 in Jackson County?

Many healthcare providers in Jackson County can test patients for COVID-19. JCDPH recommends that healthcare providers follow the [current criteria](#) to guide decisions on testing but providers are able to order COVID-19 testing for individuals as they see fit. If you don't have a healthcare provider or don't know where to go, check out this [list of collection sites](#) located throughout North Carolina.

Are tests still being done in Jackson County?

Yes. Healthcare providers are still ordering tests in Jackson County. JCDPH recommends that healthcare providers follow the [current criteria](#) to guide decisions on testing but providers are able to order COVID-19 testing for individuals as they see fit.

What does community spread (aka community transmission) mean?

Community spread occurs when a patient contracts a disease, like COVID-19, and we don't know how they contracted it, i.e. the patient did not have a travel history or a known contact with another person with COVID-19. On March 19, North Carolina had its first case of COVID-19 from community spread. On April 13, Jackson County confirmed community spread in our county.

What is social distancing? Should I be doing it?

Social distancing means keeping as much space (at least 6 feet) between you and other people as possible as well as avoiding gathering in groups of 10 or more to help slow or stop the spread of disease.

I've heard a lot about taking precautions if at a higher risk for severe illness. But what about the rest of us? What about children?

Those who are 65+ years, people living in a nursing home or long-term care facility, and people with other [high risk conditions](#) should be taking extra precautions because they are at a higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19. However, this does not mean that everyone else is not at risk for illness. The entire community can still contract COVID-19 but their symptoms may not be as severe.

Is COVID-19 just like the flu?

While COVID-19 and the flu have similar symptoms (fever, shortness of breath, and coughing), there are many differences that we should note. COVID-19 is a new virus so little is known about it. Since it is new to humans, no one has immunity to it and there is no vaccine at this time. We can't accurately predict the morbidity or mortality of it and it's hard to plan for the implications COVID-19 will have on our healthcare system. On the other hand, the flu is not new and there are decades of research on it. We have a sense of certainty about the seasonality of the flu and are able to make educated predictions on the morbidity and mortality of it. We all should be social distancing as much as possible to slow or stop the spread of COVID-19. We should be considering those who are more vulnerable to severe complications. And we should be concerned about not stressing our healthcare system so it can continue to care for our community.

How can I volunteer to help?

People with medical experience not currently involved in the COVID-19 response now have the opportunity to put their skills to work. To volunteer, fill out the application at <https://terms.ncem.org/TRS/>

How can I get WIC benefits right now?

The Jackson County WIC Program is open during this state of emergency. While the office is closed to the public, the WIC staff has the ability to serve families over the telephone so there is not a disruption to benefits. If you are a current WIC family, or you would like to enroll in WIC, please call 828-587-8243 for assistance.

Where can Spanish speaking community members receive information on COVID-19?

North Carolina has Spanish speaking staff on call through NC 211 to assist our Spanish speaking community. If you know someone who needs assistance or more information on COVID-19, tell them to dial 2-1-1 or 1-888-892-1162.

Should we be wearing face masks?

On April 3, the CDC came out with new recommendations for the public regarding homemade cloth face covering in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (like grocery stores and pharmacies). Starting on June 26, Governor Roy Cooper required that all wear cloth face coverings in public settings (with some exceptions). Learn more [here](#).