

Research Report

**PENNSYLVANIANS CANNOT AFFORD
TO WAIT FOR SENATE-CONFIRMED
HHS SECRETARY**

ACCOUNTABLE 

SUMMARY:

- **COVID-19 By The Numbers In Pennsylvania As Of Late January:**
 - **Total Case Count:** 808,951
 - **Daily Case Count Average:** 5,172
 - **Total Death Count:** 20,609
 - **Hospital ICU Occupancy Rate:** 80%
 - **Pennsylvanians Completely Vaccinated:** 1%
 - **Pennsylvanians Who Received At Least One Vaccine Dose:** 5.1%
 - **Percent Of Vaccine Supply Distributed:** 49%

COVID-19 Continues To Devastate Pennsylvania As State Vaccination Efforts Lag Behind, Highlighting Need For Coordinated Federal Response

What Pennsylvanians Are Reading ...

- **Trib Live HEADLINE:** “Frustration Grows With Pennsylvania’s ‘Confusing’ Vaccine Rollout” [Trib Live, [1/24/21](#)]
- **Spotlight PA HEADLINE:** “Hundreds Of Pa. Senior-Living Facilities Haven’t Received Vaccine As Widened Eligibility, Low Supply, Slow Rollout” [Spotlight PA, [1/26/21](#)]
- **WPVI HEADLINE:** “PA COVID: Gov. Tom Wolf Pins Pennsylvania’s Vaccine Difficulties On Supply Overpromises” [WPVI, [1/26/21](#)]
- **Penn Live HEADLINE:** “COVID-19 Deaths Again Top 200 In Pa.” [Penn Live, [1/26/21](#)]
- **Philadelphia Inquirer HEADLINE:** “Camden Schools Delay In-Person Learning Until At Least April; Death Toll Remains High In Pa.; Philly Expects Vaccine Supply Issues For Months” [Philadelphia Inquirer, [1/26/21](#)]

Pennsylvania COVID-19 Cases Continue To Strain Hospital Capacity As Deaths Climb

Pennsylvania Recently Topped 800,000 Total COVID-19 Cases—Up Roughly 160,000 Cases From End Of 2020

As of Jan. 25, 2021, Pennsylvania Had Reported 808,951 Total COVID-19 Cases With 20,609 Deaths. [New York Times, accessed [01/25/21](#)]

As Of Dec. 31, 2020, Pennsylvania Had 640,325 COVID Cases. “Pennsylvania reported 8,992 new cases of COVID-19 as of 12:00 a.m. on Thursday. The statewide case total since the start of the pandemic is now 640,325.” [WHTM, [12/31/20](#)]

Jan. 25: Daily COVID Case Average For Last Seven Days In Pennsylvania Was 5,172. [New York Times, accessed [1/25/21](#)]

Pennsylvania Recorded Over 20,600 Deaths—Up Almost 30% From The End Of 2020.

As of Jan. 25, 2021, Pennsylvania Had Reported 20,609 COVID-19 Deaths. [New York Times, accessed [01/25/21](#)]

- **As Of Dec. 30, 2020, Pennsylvania Had Reported 15,978 COVID-19 Deaths.** “As of Wednesday night, the commonwealth says it has tracked 306 new deaths, for a total of 15,978 lives lost to COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic.” [WHYY, [12/31/20](#)]

As Of January 21, 2021, All But One Of Pennsylvania’s 67 Counties Had “Substantial” COVID Transmission, Which Was Highest Level Possible.

As Of Jan. 21, 2021, 66 Counties In Pennsylvania Had “Substantial” COVID Transmission, Which Was The Highest Level Possible. “There are three levels of transmission: low, moderate and substantial. For the week ending January 21, 66 counties were in the substantial level of transmission. Cameron County is only county to be in the low level of county transmission.” [Office of Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf, [1/25/21](#)]

- **Pennsylvania Had 67 Counties.** [County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania, accessed [1/25/21](#)]

As Of Late January, Pennsylvania ICU Occupancy Was 80 Percent After Record Holiday-Time Surge In Hospitalizations That Was “Almost Double The Previous Peak From Spring.”

As Of Jan. 25, 2021, Pennsylvania ICU Bed Occupancy Was At 80%. [The New York Times, accessed [01/25/21](#)]

- **WCAU, December 2020 HEADLINE: “Pa.’s Supply Of ICU Beds Dwindles As Virus Hospitalizations Surge”** [WCAU, [12/4/20](#)]

As Of Dec. 31, 2020, Nearly 6,000 People Were Hospitalized With COVID-19, Including 1,178 In Intensive Care; “That Hospitalization Rate Is Now Almost Double The Previous Peak From Spring.” “As of Thursday, there were 5,962 people hospitalized due to the coronavirus, with 1,178 in intensive care. As of Wednesday night, the commonwealth says it has tracked 306 new deaths, for a total of 15,978 lives lost to COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic. That hospitalization rate is now almost double the previous peak from spring.” [WHYY, [12/31/20](#)]

Pennsylvanians Reported Confusion And Frustration As State Struggled To Vaccinate Even Most Vulnerable Populations

Pennsylvania Had Administered Only Half Of Vaccine Supply It Had Already Been Allocated, Completely Vaccinating Only 1% And Lagging Behind Nation By Giving Initial Dose To Less Than 5%.

As Of Jan. 25th, Pennsylvania Had Administered 49% Of Vaccine Supply It Had Been Allocated. [New York Times – “See How the Vaccine Rollout Is Going in Your State,” accessed [1/25/21](#)]

- **The US National Average For Percent Of Vaccine Doses Used Was 53-Percent.** [New York Times – “See How the Vaccine Rollout Is Going in Your State,” accessed [1/25/21](#)]

As Of Jan. 26, 5.1% Of Pennsylvanians Had Received At Least One Dose Of The Vaccine. [Washington Post, [1/26/21](#)]

- **The US National Average For Vaccine Distribution By Population Was 5.8-Percent.** [Washington Post – “COVID-19 Vaccine Distributions,” accessed [1/26/21](#)]

As Of Jan. 24, Only 1% Of Pennsylvania’s Population Had Been Fully Vaccinated. [Washington Post, [1/24/21](#)]

- **The US National Average For Percent Of Population Fully Vaccinated Was 1%.** [Washington Post, [1/24/21](#)]

Residents Reported Confusion And Frustration As Pennsylvania Quickly Expanded Priority Vaccine Population After Learning “Federal Stockpile Of Vaccine Was Depleted, And Disruptions In Supply Were Likely.”

Pennsylvania Announced Expanded Vaccine Eligibility Days After Learning “The Federal Stockpile Of Vaccine Was Depleted, And Disruptions In Supply Were Likely To Occur As A Result.” “But the announcement by Pennsylvania officials — expanding the vaccination eligibility pool to people older than 65, and those with cancer, diabetes and many other conditions — came days after health officials learned the federal stockpile of vaccine was depleted, and disruptions in supply were likely to occur as a result.” [Trib Live, [1/24/21](#)]

- **“Many Health Professionals In Western Pennsylvania Said There Is Not Enough Vaccine In The Region To Accommodate The Change” In Eligibility That Allowed More Older People And At-Risk People Early Access To The Vaccine.** “But the announcement by Pennsylvania officials — expanding the vaccination eligibility pool to people older than 65, and those with cancer, diabetes and many other conditions — came days after health officials learned the federal stockpile of vaccine was depleted, and disruptions in supply were likely to occur as a result. ‘We have scheduled all of the vaccine we have available at this point,’ said Dr. Amy Crawford-Faucher, chair of family medicine for Allegheny Health Network, who, like many health professionals in Western Pennsylvania, said there is not enough vaccine in the region to accommodate the change.” [Trib Live, [1/24/21](#)]
- **“With 3.5 Million People Now Eligible For The COVID Vaccine, There’s A Lot Of Confusion And Frustration Over The Expanded Rollout.”** “With 3.5 million people now eligible for the COVID vaccine, there’s a lot of confusion and frustration over the expanded rollout.” [WHTM, [1/24/21](#)]

Meanwhile Thousands Of Nursing Home Residents Waited On Vaccine Doses As Federal Government Struggled To Coordinate Facilities.

As Of Dec. 28, The Federal Program To Vaccinate Nursing Home Residents “Has Only Used About 16% Of Allocated Doses In Philadelphia And 14.5% In New Jersey.” “As healthy 65-year-olds scramble to find scarce COVID-19 vaccines in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, thousands of vulnerable people in those states’ highest priority group — people who live in nursing homes and assisted living facilities — are still waiting for shots. They are part of a federal program that gave pharmacy giants CVS and Walgreens the responsibility of going from facility to facility to give shots. So far, that program, which began vaccinating nursing home residents and staff on Dec. 28, has used only about 16% of allocated doses in Philadelphia and 14.5% in New Jersey, according to health department data. The situation is less clear in Pennsylvania, which did not divulge how many shots it has allotted for the program.” [Philadelphia Inquirer, [1/25/21](#)]

Confusing Vaccine Process Pushed State Senator To Call For “Better Communication” And “Transparency.”

WHTM HEADLINE: “Pa. Sen. Calls For Better Communication, Transparency In COVID-19 Vaccination Process” [WHTM, [1/24/21](#)]

Further Delays In Confirming Biden’s HHS Secretary Could Impede Administration’s COVID-19 Response.

Biden Nominee Xavier Becerra Faced Uphill Confirmation Battle, Based Not On Concerns Over Competency On COVID-19, But Republican Objections To His Pro-Choice Views And Support For Universal Health Care. “Xavier Becerra, President-elect Joe Biden’s pick for health and human services secretary, the Cabinet member tasked with overseeing vaccinating millions of Americans against the coronavirus as quickly as possible, faces an uphill confirmation battle. It won’t be because of how he’ll handle the pandemic, but over his support for abortion rights and universal health care, say Republicans who control the Senate and are already warning that he could be denied confirmation, or see the process take longer.” [NBC News, [12/28/20](#)]

CNN: President Biden’s Administration “Inherit[ed] No Coronavirus Vaccine Distribution Plan To Speak Of From The Trump Administration.” “Newly sworn in President Joe Biden and his advisers are inheriting no coronavirus vaccine distribution plan to speak of from the Trump administration, sources tell CNN, posing a significant challenge for the new White House. The Biden administration has promised to try to turn the Covid-19 pandemic around and drastically speed up the pace of vaccinating Americans against the virus. But in the immediate hours following Biden being sworn into office on Wednesday, sources with direct knowledge of the new administration’s Covid-related work told CNN one of the biggest shocks that the Biden team had to digest during the transition period was what they saw as a complete lack of a vaccine distribution strategy under former President Donald Trump, even weeks after multiple vaccines were approved for use in the United States.” [CNN, [1/21/21](#)]

NBC News: Regarding Becerra’s Confirmation As HHS Secretary, “A Delay Could Complicate Biden’s COVID-19 Response.” “While Democrats remain confident that Becerra’s confirmation is not in any real danger, a delay could complicate Biden’s Covid-19 response.” [NBC News, [12/28/20](#)]

- **HHS Is A “Crucial Agency Amid The Pandemic That Will Be Tasked With Distributing Hundreds Of Millions Of Coronavirus Vaccines.”** “If confirmed, Becerra would become the first Latino to lead HHS, a crucial agency amid the pandemic that will be tasked with distributing hundreds of millions of coronavirus vaccines.” [Newsweek, [12/7/20](#)]