



CORONAVIRUS TODAY – MAY 11 – RECOVERED FROM COVID; CHURCHES AND OUTSIDE WORSHIP; MORE SNAP

State Health and Human Services Secretary Mandy Cohen spoke at a televised news conference May 5 about the state's need to ramp up testing even more. Photo courtesy: NC Dept of Public Safety

May 11, 2020 by [Editor](#) [Leave a Comment](#)

Questions arise about who is recovered from COVID-19, who should get tested and the nuances of governor's modified order for worship houses.

By North Carolina Health News staff

Many recover from COVID-19, but defining who has is difficult

Nearly 60 percent of the 15,045 people who have tested positive for COVID-19 in North Carolina presumably have recovered from the virus, according to state health officials.

Mandy Cohen, secretary of the state Department of Health and Human Services, cautioned, though, that there is no firm definition for recovery nor has the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offered guidance on how to make that determination.

Nonetheless, North Carolinians have been asking how many of the people who test positive for the virus have recuperated.

Cohen and her team estimate a median time for recovery to be about 14 days for people who were not hospitalized, and 28 days for those who had hospital stays.

The intervals were chosen based on guidance from the World Health Organization and in consultation with the CDC and other state health departments, Cohen said.

But that could change if the CDC puts out a firmer definition of what constitutes recovery, given that some people battle the disease and severe complications of infection for more than 28 days.

The information will be posted weekly on the [DHHS COVID-19 dashboard](#).

"We estimate that 9,115 North Carolinians have recovered from COVID-19," Cohen said. "It's really important to note that this is an estimate. A patient's actual recovery time could be shorter or longer depending on the severity of the illness." — *Anne Blythe*



What does 'needs a test' mean in this phase?

Gov. Roy Cooper and Health and Human Services Secretary Mandy Cohen often said last week that increased testing for COVID-19 would be crucial as social distancing requirements were eased.

They maintained that everybody who needs a test should get one, a change from what was encouraged at the start of the pandemic in North Carolina.

No longer is the state saying that testing should be limited only to those with severe symptoms and the critical frontline workers because of supply shortages.

"Need I guess is in the eyes of the beholder," Cohen said in response to a question about exactly who should be getting tested. "The way we are defining anyone who needs a test, absolutely anyone with symptoms. Anyone who has a cough or a fever, if they have loss of smell or taste. Certainly. All those folks. Anyone who is having symptoms."

Additionally, anyone who has been exposed to someone who has COVID-19 should be getting tested even if that person is not experiencing symptoms.

"It doesn't have to be immediate, but we want you to get tested in a certain window of time so that if you are positive, we know of your contacts," Cohen said.

At some of the federally funded testing sites across the state, such as at Walgreens, Walmart and Harris Teeter stores, a physician's referral for testing is not required.

"You can self-refer, say, 'I'm not feeling well or I think I've been exposed, I think I need a test,' " Cohen said. "Obviously within a physician office and such, they will do more clinical evaluation on the front end and use their clinical judgment about testing or not, but we want anyone with a symptom or anyone who has been exposed in some way to COVID-19 to get a test. It's important."

The state has the lab capacity to do more tests.

"We now just need folks to know that the guidance has changed, so if you need the test, get it," Cohen said.

Her department is working to add all the testing sites to the dashboard with daily case counts and other news. — *Anne Blythe*

How should churches define impossible?

When Gov. Roy Cooper modified the stay-at-home order last week to allow parks and some businesses, he made special note that outdoor worship services with more than 10 people would be allowed as long as social distancing measures were followed.

[The order states that worship services and other protected First Amendment activities](#), such as protests, were excluded from the definition of mass gatherings, which limits crowds to no more than 10 people.



Those activities, as the order states, “shall take place outdoors unless impossible.”

Eighteen Republican state senators [sent a letter to Cooper asking for clarity](#). It was posted to Medium by Senator Berger Press Shop.

“Many faith leaders and other constituents who are eager to resume worship services this Sunday have reached out to our offices with confusion of what conditions make an outdoor worship service ‘impossible,’” the senators’ May 8 letter states. “Is a worship service impossible in the event of severe weather, light rain, strong wind, heat or cold? Is it impossible if a particular church lacks access to a suitable outdoor space to conduct a worship service for its congregation? Is it impossible to conduct a worship service outside if the audio, visual or other equipment necessary to conduct the service cannot be moved outside or is otherwise at risk of damage if moved outside?”

When asked about the issue, Mandy Cohen, secretary of the state Department of Health and Human Services, provided a long explanation for why the order was modified the way it was but said a legal team was trying to craft a more explicit response.

“When you go indoors, a couple of things are happening,” Cohen said. “One, the airflow is not as good. Second, you are touching more surfaces by nature. You’re going indoors, you’re touching doorknobs, you’re having shared facilities and bathrooms and other things. You’re touching the books, the pews, etc. The third part is you tend to be more close together because it’s an indoor space rather than outdoor where you potentially have more space to move around.

“So those are all the factors that we want to think about,” Cohen added. “So as people think about needing to do indoor activities that are at higher risk, we want them to think about those things.”

Houses of worship should consider airflow, surfaces touched a lot that need to be cleaned deeply and spacing people apart by at least six feet.

“We don’t want to interrupt anyone’s ability to worship, to pray,” Cohen said. “But we want to keep folks safe. That’s why we’re trying to find this middle ground. We’re hoping as many, many people can heed our advice, and say, ‘Look, can we have our church services outdoors.’ But even when you’re outdoors, please stay six feet apart. Please wear face coverings. Please wash your hands.”

Cohen acknowledged that there might be extenuating circumstances.

“If you need to come indoors, we want you to stay below 10 people,” Cohen said. “Can you use online streaming to do worship services? Can you stagger? Can you go into multiple rooms so that folks aren’t in the same physical place, again so there’s different air movement, different surfaces that people are touching? Those are the kinds of things that we’re asking people to do — again — to be as protective as we possibly can and to keep viral spread as low as we possibly can.” — *Anne Blythe*



Coronavirus by the numbers

According to [NCDHHS data](#), as of Monday morning:

- 550 people total in North Carolina have died of coronavirus.
- 15,045 have been diagnosed with the disease. Of those, 464 are in the hospital. The hospitalization figure is a snapshot of people hospitalized with coronavirus on a given day and does not represent all of the North Carolinians who may have been in the hospital throughout the course of the epidemic.
- More than 195,000 tests have been completed thus far, though not all labs report their negative results to the state, so the actual number of completed coronavirus tests is likely higher.
- Most of the cases (42 percent) were in people ages 25-49. While 21 percent of the positive diagnoses were in people ages 65 and older, seniors make up 86 percent of coronavirus deaths in the state.
- 109 outbreaks are ongoing in group facilities across the state, including nursing homes, correctional and residential care facilities.
- There are 3,384 ventilators in hospitals across the state and 675 ventilators in use, not just for coronavirus cases but also for patients with other reasons for being in the hospital.

SNAP boost

People enrolled in the state's Food and Nutrition Services program will get a boost this month so families have access to food during the pandemic.

All households enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program program will get the maximum amount available regardless of what they typically get.

A family of four would be eligible for \$645.

Nearly 360,000 households should see the increase on their Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards after May 22, [according to a state Department of Health and Human Services news release](#).

Recipients will receive their regular benefits and should receive two separate payments in May, the DHHS release states, unless households already have received the maximum amount for the month.

Questions about the emergency supplements and the FNS program should be directed to the EBT Call Center at 1-866-719-0141.— *Anne Blythe*

Shelter in motels and hotels

Trillium Health Resources is working with the state Department of Public Safety and the Federal Emergency Management Agency to help pay for a hotel or motel stay for homeless people and others during the pandemic.



Recipients must meet certain criteria for the assistance:

Isolation cases in which the person does not need to be hospitalized but needs a place to quarantine safely. Isolation orders will be required for the help.

Quarantine cases in which someone has been exposed to the virus and needs somewhere to shelter. A quarantine order is required for the assistance.

Social distance cases in which someone from a high-risk group who, due to their living circumstances, cannot comply with social distancing restrictions.

The FEMA public assistance program will pay for transportation to the hotel or motel, the stay and meals or food while there, but receipts must be saved for documentation.

Anyone who thinks they may meet this criteria can call Trillium's Housing Coordinator at 910-612-2188 for an assessment. There are limits to the length of stay and price the program will pay for a room. — *Anne Blythe*

Inmate, Four Cumberland County Jailers Test Positive For Covid-19

An inmate at the Cumberland County Detention Center has tested positive for COVID-19, county officials announced Monday.

The news comes days after the Sheriff's Office [announced](#) in a news release that four detention officers had tested positive on May 5. The officers, who are the first Sheriff's Office employees to test positive, were at home recuperating, according to the release.

The inmate who has tested positive started feeling poorly on Wednesday and was put into medical isolation. Test results on Monday confirmed he had COVID-19, according to the county. He is being quarantined in the jail's medical unit, The Fayetteville Observer reported. — *Greg Barnes*