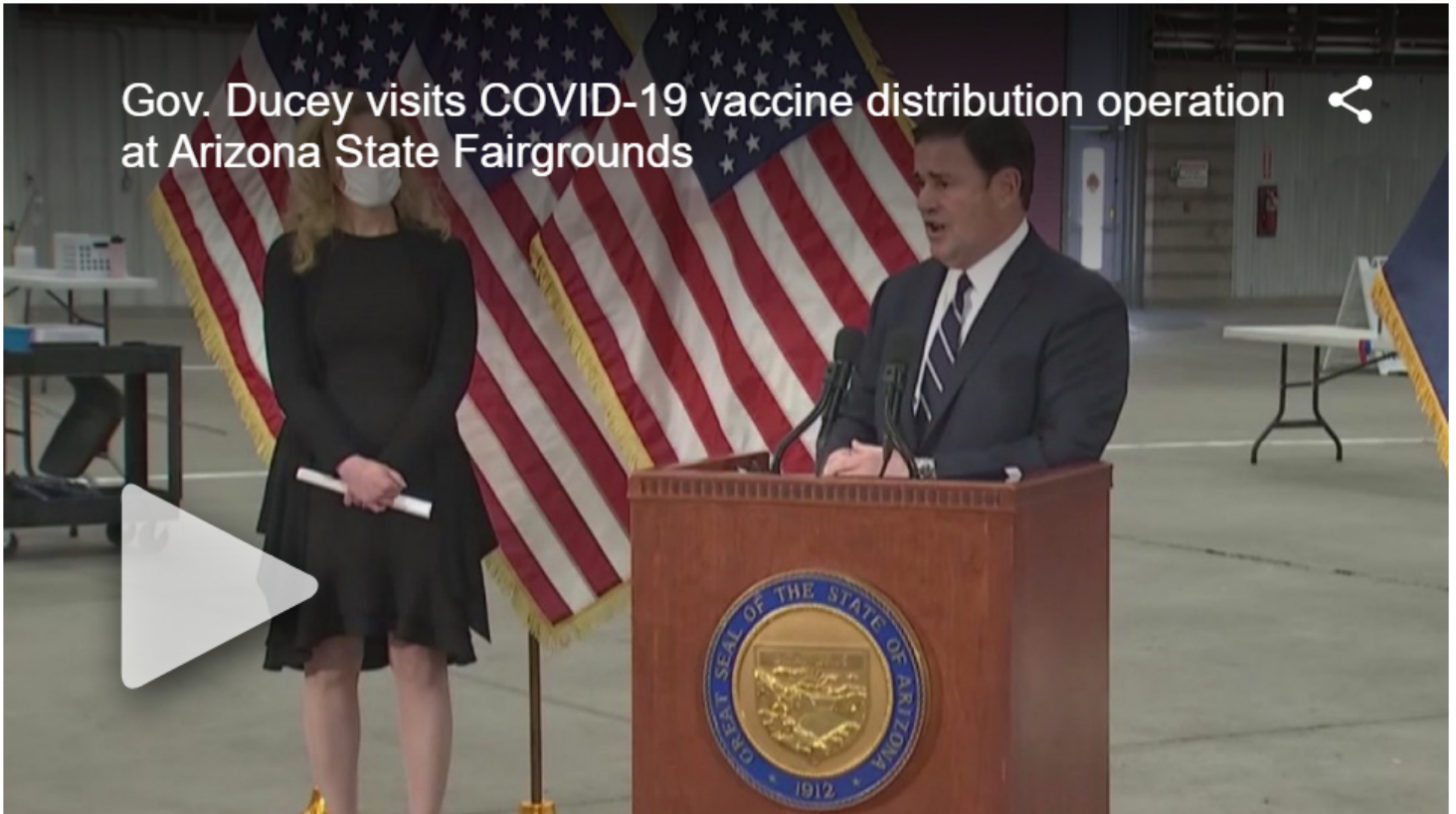# Gov. Ducey touts COVID-19 vaccine as open hospital beds hit record low

By Steve Nielsen , Brent Corrado and Paul Davenport | **Published** December 16, 2020 | **Updated** December 17, 2020 | Coronavirus in Arizona | FOX 10 Phoenix

Gov. Ducey visits COVID-19 vaccine distribution operation at Arizona State Fairgrounds

Ducey was joined by AZDHS Director Dr. Cara Christ for a tour of the drive-thru vaccination site that is being operated by Banner Health officials.

PHOENIX - Governor **Doug Ducey** implored people to get the COVID-19 vaccine when they're eligible as hospital capacity on Dec. 16 hit a record low since the start of the pandemic.

The governor visited the COVID-19 vaccine distribution site at the Arizona State Fairgrounds on Wednesday, delivering remarks about the fight against the virus, announcing $15 million in additional funding to the state's health department.

The governor was joined by Arizona Department of Health Services Director Dr. Cara Christ for a tour of the drive-thru vaccination site that is being operated by Banner Health officials.

Ducey announced the names of 10 people who received a COVID-19 vaccine on Wednesday. Christ is included in the 10 people.

The following frontline workers received Arizona's first vaccines:

- Regina Villa, registered nurse

- Olubunmi Onadeko, certified nursing assistant

- Eddy de la Torre, registered nurse

- Allison McCabe, registered nurse at skilled nursing facility

- Will Smith, Arizona National Guard Medic

- Captain Jeff Stieber, Mesa Fire Department

- Captain Kenny Overton, Phoenix Fire

- Dr. Ross Goldberg, Valleywise Health Surgeon

- Dr. Edmond Baker, Community Physician

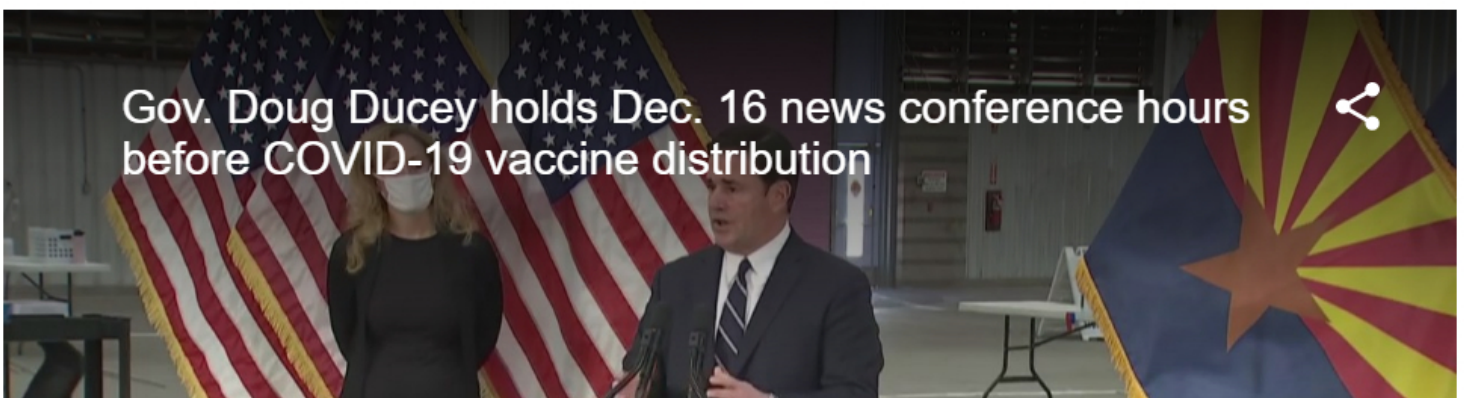- Dr. Cara Christ, Medical Doctor and ADHS Director

"The vaccine is here, and we're getting it to health care workers promptly," said Governor Ducey. "This is a significant step in the fight against COVID-19 — but the fight isn't over. We continue to urge Arizonans to follow mitigation measures and get the COVID-19 vaccine when possible. I'm grateful to the frontline workers, health care professionals and everyone working hard to get the vaccine distributed quickly and efficiently," Ducey said.

Following Ducey's announcement, Dr. Christ and frontline healthcare workers received the **COVID-19** vaccine, according to a news release from the health department.

Ducey continued to resist pressure to impose new business restrictions or a statewide mask mandate, measures requested by hospital leaders and several mayors to constrain the spread of the virus.

"We need Arizonans to step up and get the vaccine if we want to stop the spread of this virus," Ducey told reporters during a stop at the state fairgrounds, where Banner Health plans to begin vaccinating health care workers on Thursday. "It's our best shot at returning to normalcy."

WATCH THE FULL PRESS CONFERENCE HERE:

Gov. Doug Ducey holds Dec. 16 news conference hours before COVID-19 vaccine distribution
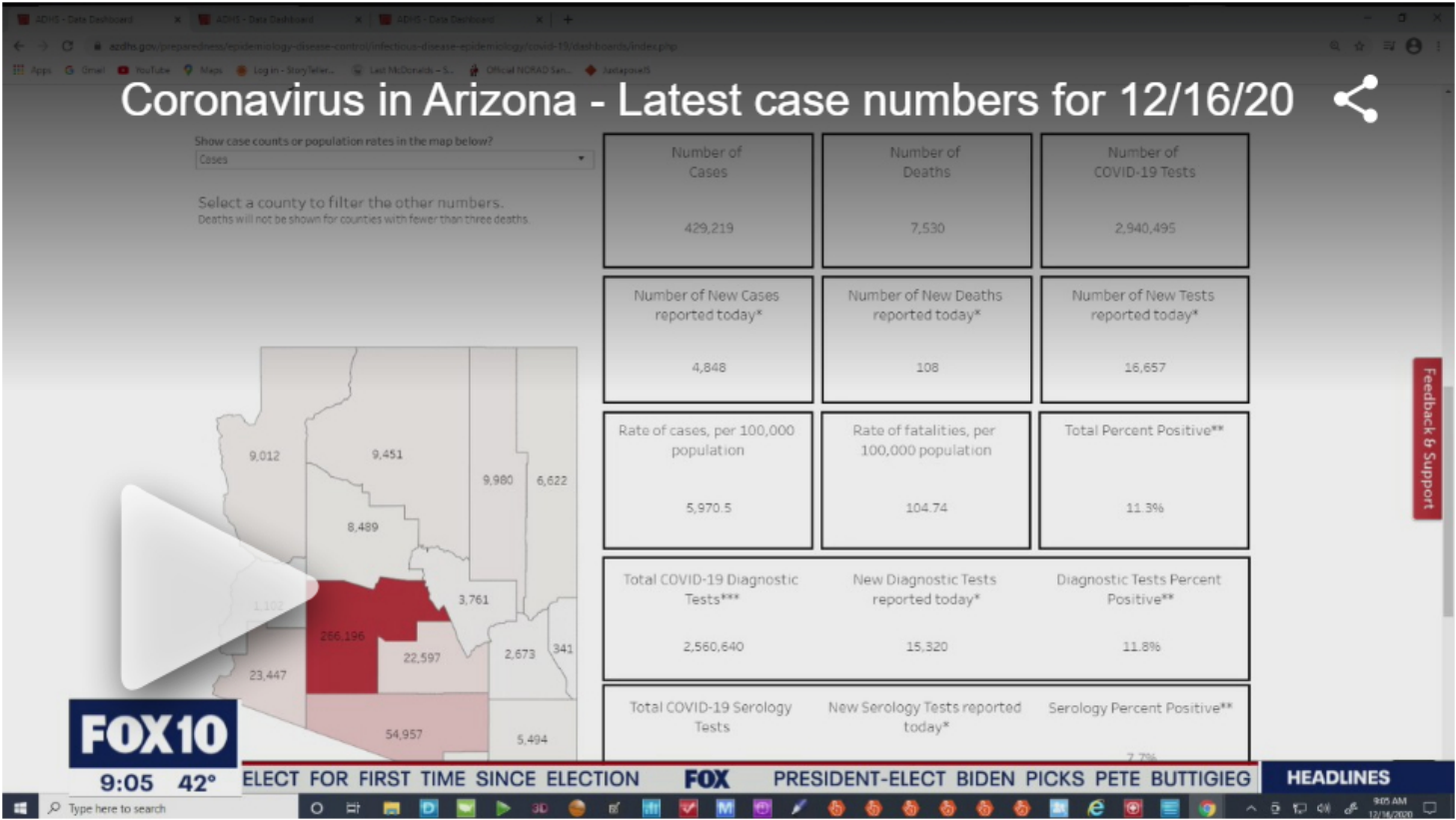
Gov. Doug Ducey holds Dec. 16 news conference hours before COVID-19 vaccine distribution

He announced the first 10 frontline workers in the state who will be getting the COVID-19 vaccine.

Arizona was allotted 384,000 vaccine doses by the end of the year. Immunizations began Tuesday for health care workers. Nursing home patients and staff will follow. Older people and those with underlying conditions that make them more vulnerable if infected are expected to be eligible sometime in the spring, followed by healthy adults.

As the state's vaccination program began to ramp up, the state Department of Health Services on Dec. 16 **reported 4,848 additional known COVID-19 cases and 108 deaths**, bringing the state's totals to 429,219 cases and 7,530 deaths.

Coronavirus in Arizona - Latest case numbers for 12/16/20

FOX 10's Troy Hayden breaks down the latest COVID-19 data from the state department of health services.

A record 92% of Arizona's inpatient beds were filled Tuesday, either by coronavirus patients or people hospitalized for other reasons, leaving only 8% available, according to the state's coronavirus dashboard.

The [dashboard](#) indicated that the hospital beds occupied on Tuesday were almost evenly divided between 3,809 coronavirus patients and 4,040 non-virus patients.

Arizona's rate of bed usage has hovered in the 10% range since early December.

And there's no end in sight, according to Arizona State University researchers who are tracking the pandemic.

The state is now seeing higher case numbers than it did when Arizona was a national hotspot in June and July. There are fewer measures in place to slow the spread and limited backup resources for hospitals than were available in the summer, said Dr. Joshua LaBaer, executive director of Arizona State University's Biodesign Institute.

"We're pushing on almost one of two beds in the hospitals right now is that one disease," LaBaer said. "That's a staggering statistic when you think about the things that can afflict people. And it certainly means that hospitals at this point are having to make decisions about keeping people out of the hospital to keep beds available for the COVID patients."

Hospital executives and public health experts have warned that the current surge, which has spiked since Thanksgiving, could exceed the health system's capacity this month.

Wednesday's report of 108 known deaths tied the number reported on Dec. 9 when state health officials said that day's report included results of reviews of past death certificates that newly attributed some additional deaths to COVID-19.

Department of Health Services officials did not immediately respond to a query from The Associated Press asking whether Wednesday's report included results from death certificate reviews.

The state recorded the highest number of daily coronavirus deaths on July 30 of 172 during the summer surge of infections.

The latest big increase in the state's death toll from COVID-19 came as the seven-day rolling average of deaths in Arizona rose from 24.6 per day on Dec. 1 to 64.1 on Tuesday.
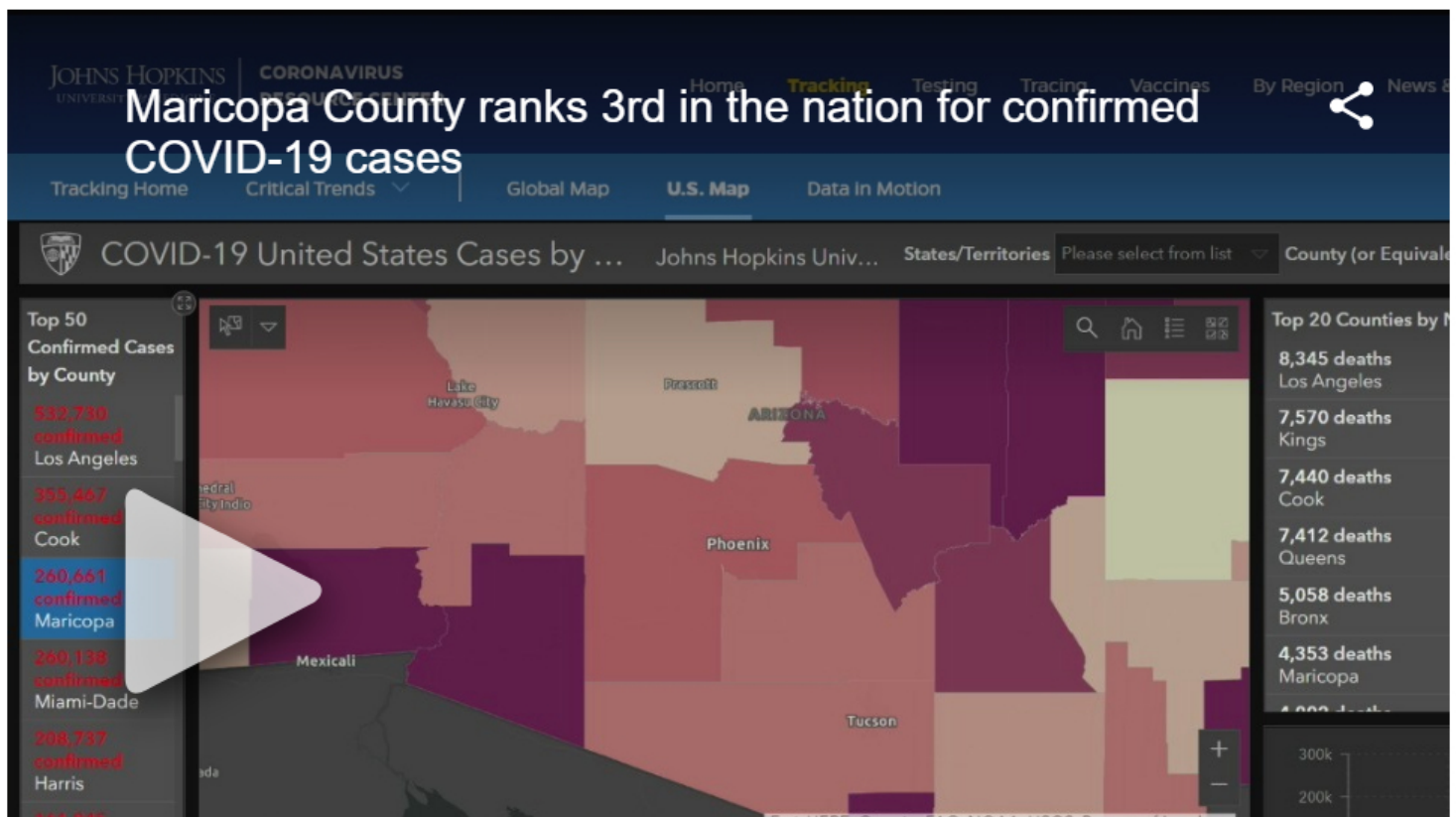
The state's rolling averages of daily new cases and daily positivity in COVID-19 testing also increased during that period.

Meanwhile, Arizona in the week ended Tuesday had the fourth-worst coronavirus diagnosis rate among U.S. states, with one person in every 155 having been diagnosed with the virus between Dec. 8 and Dec. 15.

The diagnosis rate is calculated by dividing the state's total population by the number of new cases over the previous week.

The first shipments of Pfizer's coronavirus vaccine arrived in **Arizona** on December 14. The state is expected to receive 383,750 COVID-19 vaccine doses by the end of December.

"Maricopa will receive approximately 47,000 doses and Pima will receive approximately 11,000 doses, totaling approximately 58,000 doses," read a portion of a statement released by officials with Ducey's office.

Maricopa County ranks 3rd in the nation for confirmed COVID-19 cases

The latest numbers from Johns Hopkins University show Maricopa County is now the third worst county for confirmed cases across the U.S. and sixth for the number of coronavirus deaths. We have over 260,000 cases and fall behind Cook County where Chicago is located and Los Angeles County in California.

In southern Arizona, the Pima County Board of Supervisors voted Dec. 15 to **implement a mandatory countywide curfew** in an effort to curb the spread of **COVID-19**. The curfew will be in place from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. beginning immediately.

The board didn't give a hard deadline for the curfew but said the positivity rate in the county must drop to 100 cases per every 100,000 residents for one week. That number currently is 357.

Pima County has had a voluntary curfew in place since Nov. 24. But after observing a number of businesses last weekend and collecting data, some county officials said the curfew wasn't doing enough.

RELATED: Pima County health director tests positive for COVID-19 amid outbreak within department

In another development, the Veterans Affairs agency on Dec. 15 began **administering COVID-19 vaccinations** to staff and veterans in Phoenix, starting with those at the VA health care system's nursing home.

The vaccinations are voluntary for both staff and veterans. They will be offered next to staff of the emergency department and intensive care unit of the VA's Phoenix medical center, spokeswoman Cindy Dorfner said.

The VA's health care system in Phoenix was one of 37 VA sites across the country selected to provide vaccinations because it can vaccinate large numbers of people and store the vaccines at the required extremely cold temperatures, the agency said in a statement.

The number of infections is thought to be far higher than reported because many people have not been tested, and studies suggest people can be infected with the virus without feeling sick.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death. The vast majority of people recover.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.