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## Vaccination Updates

According to the TN Dept. of Health, as of December 12th:

- A total of **8,282,580** vaccinations have been administered in Tennessee
- This was an increase of **157,431** vaccinations over the last seven days
- The percentage of people statewide with at least one dose is **56.8%**
- The percentage of people statewide with who are fully vaccinated is **50.3%**

The Dept. of Health has detailed statistics on its website regarding vaccinations by age, race, ethnicity, gender, and keeps track of which vaccine has been administered and how many doses have been delivered.

Information regarding COVID vaccines in Tennessee can be found:

[HERE](#)

## First Cases of Omicron Variant Detected in Tennessee

The omicron variant, the latest “variant of concern” identified by the World Health Organization and the Center for Disease Control, has been detected in Tennessee. The variant was first identified in South Africa on November 24<sup>th</sup>. It raised concern with health officials due to an extremely high number of mutations. While it is unknown whether the variation causes more severe disease, it is believed to be significantly more contagious.

After the variant was detected in South Africa, a number of nations responded with efforts to restrict travel from that part of the world. However, such efforts appear to have been fruitless as the variant has been detected in more than 70 countries. It was first detected in the United States on December 1<sup>st</sup>. According to the CDC, the variant has been detected in 29 states, with Tennessee being one of the most recent additions.

This past Saturday, the Shelby County health department reported the detection of two cases of the omicron variant. Dr. Michelle Taylor, Shelby County health director, said, “We did expect the Omicron variant to appear in Tennessee, as it has in 19 other states [19 was the number reported at that time]. Shelby County has excellent COVID-19 testing capacity, with several local laboratories which perform viral DNA sequencing as a part of routine surveillance. For that reason, our laboratories were able to identify the tell-tale DNA signature

of this new variant. These results indicate the variant may already be spreading in Shelby County and possibly elsewhere in the state.”

After the initial wave of COVID in the summer of 2020, Tennessee experienced a significantly larger surge in the winter months that followed. That wave was matched by a comparable surge this fall attributed to the Delta variant in September and October. That wave of COVID appeared to be waning in the early days of November. Cases are now on the rise again and the possibility of a new, more transmissible variant combined with colder weather is causing concern among health professionals.

Tennessee’s vaccination rates have remained lower compared to the rest of the nation, having the 7<sup>th</sup> lowest rate of fully vaccinated individuals in the country. This puts Tennesseans at significant risk if this new variant proves to be highly transmissible.

The CDC has recommended vaccines for individuals over 18 and has approved the Pfizer vaccine for children over the age of 5. It has recommended booster shots for individuals who have been fully vaccinated for at least six months, including children over the age of 16. More information about vaccines can be found at <https://covid19.tn.gov/>.

*The Tennessee County Services Association was created in 1954 to serve county mayors, county commissioners and county highway officials.*



## Comptroller Releases Labor Market Report Unemployment Continues to Decline for Most Counties

The Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Department has released its October edition of the Tennessee Labor Market Report. This monthly bulletin provides current information about workplace trends, including employment data and workplace statistics, across the country and also specific to Tennessee.

According to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the rate of workplace incidents decreased from 2019 to 2020, from 2.8 cases per 100 full-time workers to 2.7 cases per 100. In 2019, about 5 percent of workplace incidents were categorized as illnesses, but in 2020 that portion quadrupled to more than 20 percent. In 2019, about 11,000 cases of illness were respiratory illness,

while in 2020, respiratory illness cases made up over 425,000 of the illness instances. The industry with the highest nonfatal incidence rate in the private sector was healthcare. Given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, these data make sense: COVID-19 can lead to respiratory illness, healthcare workers tend to be more routinely exposed to the virus through their work, and “workplaces” turned to home offices with potentially a lower proportion of incidents as many transitioned to remote work.

The report also provides statistics on the Tennessee civilian labor workforce. From October 2020 to October 2021, the unemployment rate (not seasonally adjusted) decreased in 65 counties, increased in 10

counties, and remained steady in 20 counties. The county with the highest unemployment rate in October 2021 was Perry County with a rate of 5.3%, which decreased from 7.2% one year prior. With a rate of 2.2%, Williamson County had the lowest unemployment rate in October 2021, having decreased from 4.5% the year before. Overall, the state unemployment rate (seasonally adjusted) was 4.2% in October 2021, which was slightly lower than the U.S. unemployment rate.

The full labor market report can be accessed at the Comptroller’s website

[HERE](#)

## TCCA Survey on County Commissions

The Tennessee County Commissioners Association is gathering data about county commissions across Tennessee.

We frequently receive questions from members regarding compensation and benefits of county commissioners. We are conducting a survey this winter to collect more up to date information on county commissions in Tennessee. By helping us collect this information, we can make it available to you.

The survey will be open until Wednesday, December 22<sup>nd</sup>. Thank you to all of you who have already completed the survey! We are only lacking a few more counties.

We are also reviewing our contact information for county commissioners. With over 1600, there are constant changes as vacancies occur or county commissioners change their address, email, etc. Please send a current contact list for all your county commission members to Mary Grace Donaldson at [marygrace.donaldson@tncounties.org](mailto:marygrace.donaldson@tncounties.org).

To fill out the survey, you can access the form [HERE](#).

## Counties Join National Opioid Settlements

**As national settlements have been negotiated with opioid manufacturers and distributors, counties in Tennessee have begun joining.**

After suffering from the effects of the opioid crisis for more than a decade, counties are hopeful that funds to address the problem will begin to become available next year. Tennessee could receive as much as \$613 million over 18 years from three major pharmaceutical distributors and Johnson & Johnson. Attorney General Herbert Slatery’s office has made resources available on their

website to assist with this process. These resources include FAQ’s, a one-page summary of the process, a sample resolution, a state/subdivision agreement and copies of the extensive settlement documents. Counties are instructed to register with the national opioid settlement website at:

[nationalopioidsettlement.com](http://nationalopioidsettlement.com)

The resources provided by the Attorney General’s office can be found [HERE](#).

## Comptroller's Office Suspends Process for Employers to Request Exemptions from Tennessee's COVID Law.

The exemption process was established as a part of Public Chapter 6 to provide relief to employers who risked the loss of federal funds as a result of complying with the Tennessee law.

After courts in Kentucky and Louisiana issued preliminary injunctions to prevent the federal government from enforcing its employer mandates, the Comptroller suspended the process of applying for exemptions to the state's prohibition against employers instituting the federal mandates. Prior to the program's suspension, the Comptroller's Office had issued 69 exemptions to various employers.

The office will continue to accept and process notices for exemption, but will grant no exemptions until it appears that the federal mandates are going forward.



## State Funding Board Hears Economic Forecasts

After meeting twice in November, the board voted to set revenue projections for the upcoming fiscal year

Last month, the State Funding Board met twice to discuss the state of the economy and make decisions regarding revenue projections for the Fiscal Year 2022 budget. The Board is made up of five members, including Comptroller of the Treasury Jason E. Mumpower and State Treasurer David H. Lillard, Jr. In the first meeting on the 17<sup>th</sup>, the Board heard its annual presentations from economic experts. These presentations provide an opportunity for Board members to ask questions about the state's economic outlook and to gain information to inform their budgetary decisions.

In the last year, the economy has been very strong. Even though gross domestic product (GDP) fell sharply at the beginning of the pandemic, it has rebounded to similar levels predicted before the pandemic. While consumers did not experience significant increases in income, US citizens have benefited from government funds, especially in the form of economic impact payments from the IRS. These transfer payments assisted people with basic needs during the pandemic and encouraged more immediate spending. Additionally, the pandemic impacted consumer behavior

by creating pent-up demand in the economy. Following virus-related shutdowns, consumers emerged with more spending readiness. Consumers are also tending to purchase big-ticket items such as houses, construction materials, and cars. These factors contribute to high levels of economic activity. Tennessee has benefited from these conditions by collecting significant tax revenue on all of this spending. Taxes on housing and construction projects have generated massive amounts of tax revenue, and online sales through marketplace facilitators have also contributed to Tennessee's tax collections. While retail and hospitality industries have struggled in the pandemic, data shows that they have made strong recoveries.

In making predictions for the coming fiscal year, the recurring theme of the presentations was economic uncertainty. Though FY21 ended strong, the realities of inflation, supply chain issues, and employment patterns may lead to a slowing of growth in FY22 and FY23. The country is experiencing record high rates of inflation. This can be attributed to a rising demand for goods and services during the pandemic

as well as spending by the federal government. Since wages are not rising as quickly as prices, the impact of this economic growth may be more nominal than real. It is anticipated that consumer spending will slow as consumers feel the effects of inflation and lose momentum in their spending habits.

The presentations on Nov. 17 informed the Board's decision to approve state revenue projections in the following meeting. Director of Budget David Thurman appeared before the Board on the 23<sup>rd</sup> to summarize the factors influencing projections. The theme of uncertainty combined with much of the federal stimulus being non-recurring has led the budget office to expect a rebalancing of spending patterns. The Board approved a projected general fund growth rate for FY22 between 7.75% and 8.5% and a growth rate of 1.75% to 2.25% for FY23. Even using conservative estimates, the growth rate for FY22 is substantially higher than pre-pandemic rates of revenue growth. It will potentially give the General Assembly significant additional funding to dedicate to state priorities in the upcoming budget on top of the record amounts of one-time federal funds the state has already received.

## NACo High Performance Leadership Academy

The January Cohort of this online training course will be launching soon. Make your plans to become a stronger leader in 2022. The on-boarding orientation for this cohort will take place December 15<sup>th</sup>.

Join the 1,700 counties already benefiting from the effectiveness of the NACo High Performance Leadership Academy, the 12-week, online leadership program led by the late General Colin Powell. More than twenty county officials and staff from Tennessee have graduated from the program, with three more recently graduating from the September cohort.

**To learn more or enroll, click**

[HERE](#)

## Upcoming Events

- **NACo High Performance Leadership Academy – Next Cohort will kick off January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022.** On-boarding orientation will take place on December 15<sup>th</sup>. See the link in the sidebar to learn more and to register.
- **NACo Legislative Conference – February 16-22, 2022, Washington Hilton, Washington, D.C.** The National Association of Counties brings together nearly 2,000 elected and appointed county officials to focus on federal policy issues that impact counties and our residents. Attendees have the opportunity to engage in second-to-none policy and educational sessions, interact with federal officials and participate in congressional briefings and meetings. Go [HERE](#) to learn more.
- **TCSA County Government Day – February 28 – March 1, 2022 – Nashville, TN, Downtown DoubleTree Hotel.**

For more information about NACo Conferences and Events,

visit [www.naco.org](http://www.naco.org)

For more information about CTAS Training,

visit [www.ctas.tennessee.edu](http://www.ctas.tennessee.edu)

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