

One preliminary projection of covid-19's impact in Ky. shows it better off than border states; another one's latest take is worse

By Al Cross
Kentucky Health News

How many Kentuckians will be infected with the coronavirus? How many will develop its disease, covid-19? How many will die from the disease? And how does Kentucky compare to adjoining states?

The answers to those questions are still unclear, mainly because testing for the virus is still very limited, handicapping scientists who track diseases.

A group of epidemiologists has a model, used by Gov. Andy Beshear, which projects that Kentucky will lose less of its population to covid-19 than any major bordering state except West Virginia, a small state with even more limited data.

However, the latest forecast from another model, first reported in the state by Kentucky Health News a week ago, also shows Kentucky not doing as well as it did in the previous forecast.

The model that Beshear has shown at his daily press conferences, in simplified form, gives estimates in round numbers, indicating how preliminary the forecasts are.

It projects that Kentucky will lose 13,000 people to covid-19 if there is poor

compliance with Beshear's orders that have banned mass gatherings, shut down schools and shuttered most businesses and churches. That is 0.29 percent of the state's population. That is less than any other bordering state except West Virginia, which is virtually the same at 0.28%.

If there is strict compliance, the model projects, Kentucky will lose 2,000 citizens, or 0.04% of its population. That is less than any bordering state, with the possible exception of West Virginia, where the forecast is merely for fewer than 1,000, or 0.06% -- apparently rough because of the state's small population and limited data.

The worst bordering state in both scenarios of the model is Illinois, which is projected to lose 0.53% in the poor-compliance scenario and 0.18% with strict compliance.

The model's graph for Kentucky implicitly illustrates how preliminary the projections are.

The graph marks the day it was made, April 6, which is almost two months before June 4, the day the model projects Kentucky hospitals would become overloaded with covid-19 patients if there is

poor compliance with Beshear's orders. In the strict-compliance scenario, there would be plenty of hospital beds, but the peak use of hospitals would be even later in June.

A much earlier peak of hospital use, and of deaths, is projected by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington. It says the likeliest peak for use of hospitals is April 21, and the likeliest peak for deaths is April 24-25, with 54 deaths each day.

This model also predicts a much higher death rate, 0.39% of Kentucky's population, a higher rate than predicted for any bordering state. The latest forecast of 1,750 deaths is more than twice the number that the model projected a week earlier, when Kentucky's projected rate was less than that of any bordering state. The earlier projection also predicted later peaks for Kentucky.

The jumpy numbers also illustrate the paucity of data, and perhaps a reason for the big difference within one week. The IHME model is based on deaths, but attribution of deaths to covid-19 varies among states, and Kentucky may be attributing more deaths to the disease than other states.

Beshear said recently that if a person tests positive for the coronavirus, the state counts that person as a covid-19 death, even though almost all 59 Kentucky victims (as of Monday) had other health conditions that could have killed them anyway. Some other states leave that call up to the physician, and the limited number of tests has prevented post-mortem testing of suspected covid-19 victims in Indiana, The New York Times reported.

In a similar story, The Washington Post said, "Marc Lipsitch, a professor of epidemiology at Harvard, said there are probably some people dying with covid-19 who are not dying of covid-19. Such misattribution is a problem for any cause of death, he said, but it is a minor issue that is 'swamped by the opposite problem: deaths that are caused by covid but never attributed, so the death count is underestimated.'"

Kentucky Health News is an independent news service of the Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues, based in the School of Journalism and Media at the University of Kentucky, with support from the Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky.

Governor calls judges daily via phone conference calls

Last Tuesday afternoon, Judge Executive Donnie Watson was involved in a conference call with Governor Andy Beshear about the Corona Virus.

Watson said the governor has been calling the county judges once and sometimes twice a day.

Beshear began the conference call by speaking to the judge/executives. Then he spent 15 minutes letting the judges ask him questions.

"We will get through this together," Beshear began. "These are the absolute critical weeks."

The governor said everyone in Kentucky must be on the same page.

He talked about social distancing, widespread testing for the virus, and health care capacity.

He mentioned the problems with widespread testing. He added the state is working on getting portable ventilators.

Kentucky has 18,500 hospital beds but will need double that amount during the virus' peak expected in early May.

"Our goal is to use every hospital bed in every region first." He added the state will then look at converting other health care facilities to hospital beds if needed.

The next few weeks are so critical. Healthy at home is the place to be," he said.

Beshear's first question came from a county judge asking if weight limits the big trucks haul could be increased dur-

ing the pandemic. He said he would look into it.

The judge/executives from Crittenden and Bell counties voiced concerns about out of state hunters during the upcoming turkey season.

The Crittenden judge said his county has many turkey hunters come from Louisiana and Florida annually. Those two states are hot spots for the virus.

The Bell judge said hunters in his county come from Tennessee which has also had more cases of the virus than Kentucky.

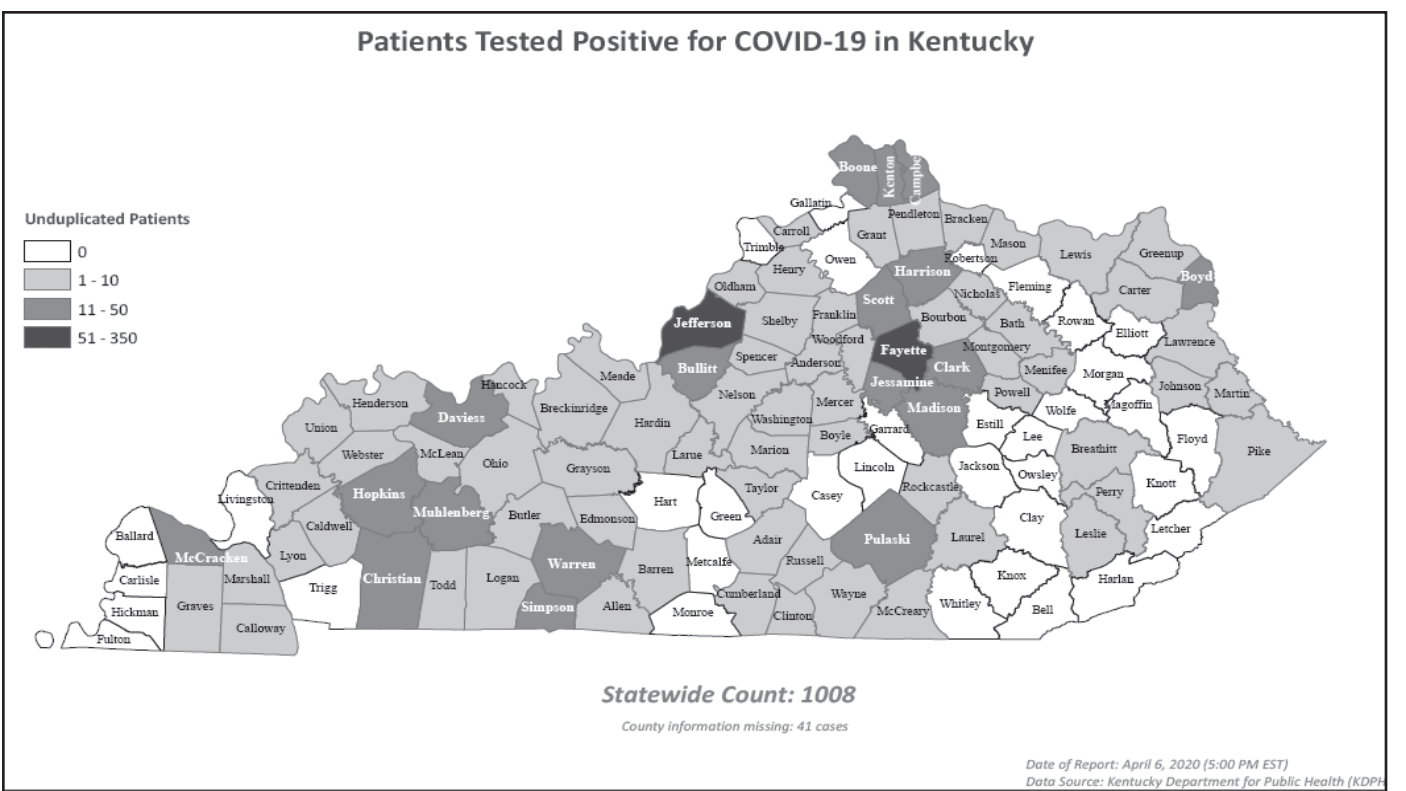
An order is now in place if anyone who travels to Kentucky from out of state, other than to work or medical reasons, will self-quarantine for 14 days. (This includes out of state turkey hunters.)

Judge Watson asked Beshear about using schools for hospital beds if needed. Beshear said that schools are on the sixth level for hospital beds.

The Cumberland County judge/executive wanted details on state parks. Since last week, state parks and golf courses have been closed.

After the conference, County Attorney Jason Riley said he has received a lot of questions about a pawnshop being open and selling firearms.

Riley said the pawnshop is licensed to sell firearms (federal law). However, he added the business must still practice social distancing.



Curfew may take effect

Continued from Page 1

Last week, all stores in Estill County were asked to enforce social distancing. The stores are also limiting the number of customers in each business at a time.

There have been no cases of Corona Virus reported in Estill County as of Monday, but Watson intends to keep it that way.

Because offices in the courthouse have closed their doors to walk-ins, Watson laid off two employees in his office.

Employees in some other offices are only working two or three days a week. The employees are rotating the days they are working.

Watson appointed O'brene Richardson as his deputy judge/executive. If Watson becomes sick and unable to serve, the deputy judge/executive will serve in his place.

Then if the deputy judge/executive becomes ill, Magistrate from District 1 Mike Abney is next in line, followed by Magistrate District 2 Paul Tipton and Magistrate District 3 Gerry Flannery.

Watson said Richardson is not on salary at this time.

In his two previous terms as county judge/executive, Watson's father, O'dell Watson, served as his deputy judge/executive. The elder Watson had served Estill County as a county judge.



Tim Price volunteered to load groceries into a truck for a patron at the Ravenna Food Bank.

Photo Submitted

Hospital offers several healthcare options

Mercy Health has a number of virtual health care options available for established and new patients. These access points allow options for continuing care at a time when social distancing is key. We are limiting face to face visits and those will only be scheduled under the provider's guidance. Mercy Health has worked to expand virtual care options to make it possible for patients to stay connected with their provider.

Mercy Health has offered Evisits through MyChart for established patients for some time. Through a MyChart Evisit, patients can receive an online diagnosis and treatment plan for non-urgent conditions. With the aid of a questionnaire, patients detail their symptoms and concerns. Once their Mercy Health Physicians provider reviews this information alongside their medical history, the patient will receive a message with the recommended treatment plan. No online video or chats are necessary.

Video visits with their provider are also available in MyChart. This helps to ensure smooth continuity

of care face to face from the comfort of a patient's home. If patients don't have MyChart or an Apple device (MyChart video visits work with Apple devices), we can accommodate using a different platform. This platform is for both established and new patients, and offers scheduled face-to-face video visits. Participants can use any device with a camera and do not need a MyChart account.

Mercy Health is now offering COVID-19 video visits free of charge to those experiencing symptoms and those who may have been exposed to someone diagnosed with COVID-19. As part of one of the largest health systems in the United States, we are pleased to utilize the resources of our sister organization, Bon Secours, to offer our patients and communities access to the Bon Secours 24/7 app. Using this app doctors can screen for COVID-19, assess mild to moderate symptoms, and discuss next steps. The free virtual visit should be used if patients are showing possible COVID-19 symptoms or may have been exposed to someone diagnosed with a posi-

tive case of COVID-19. Please note this service is for non-emergency COVID-19 visits only. If a patient is having a medical emergency, call 911 immediately. Individuals can visit bonsecours247.com or download the Bon Secours 24/7 app for free from the app store. The code CARE2020 will secure a free COVID-19 visit.

Additionally, Mercy Health has opened a 24/7 telephone hotline dedicated to public questions about COVID-19. This is for community members who have questions related to coronavirus, are showing possible symptoms, or may have had exposure to someone diagnosed with COVID-19. The number is 888-700-9011. The hotline is for non-emergent calls. The public is encouraged to call 911 for emergencies.

The Mercy Health COVID-19 hotline and the telehealth option are part of ongoing efforts to support our community and provide information and guidance.

More information on Mercy Health's COVID-19 efforts can be found at mercy.com and on our social media pages.

Irvine Police Department Activity Report

Irvine Detective Sam Hensley served an Estill County Court warrant on **Charlie Townsend**, 45, of Spencer Ridge, Beattyville on April 1 on Richmond Road. The warrant was for illegal possession of a legend drug.

Officer Jason Conrad served three warrants on **Christy M. Henry**, 34, homeless of Irvine, on March 30 at Oak Tree Inn parking

lot. Two of the warrants were from Madison County and the other from Estill County.

An Estill County warrant was served April 1 at Shell Mart by Officer Conrad on **Dustin A. Willis**, 33, of Thomas Road, Irvine.

Detective Hensley charged **Kenneth Collins**, 52, of McKee Road, Irvine with operating on a suspended or revoked operator license on April 1 on S. Irvine Road.

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